Perceiving Manipulated Information in the Internet Age. A Comparative Analysis.

The Cases of Austria, Italy and the Netherlands

Vasyl V. Kucherenko

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences
of the European University Institute

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Department of Political and Social Sciences

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the effects of individual levels of political competence and the media literacy context on spotting manipulated information in Internet news reports on unfamiliar foreign affairs issues as well as on the acceptance or rejection of the standpoint(s) such news reports promote. University students in the age category of 18-26 years old from three countries that differ in their levels of media literacy context - Austria, Italy, and the Netherlands - were the target group of participants in this experimental/quasi-experimental research (N = 736). After measuring their media habits and attitudes as well as levels of political competence, they were randomly assigned to read one of two simulated Internet news reports - either a manipulated or a non-manipulated one. Each version of the news reports was presented as being taken either from a popular 'traditional' or an 'alternative' Internet news source in each country; however, the content of both was absolutely identical. The participants then evaluated the news report they had read according to a set of characteristics. Analysis revealed that political competence appeared to have no effects at all on spotting and rejecting. Moreover, a comparison of three age categories in the Italian sample (18-26, 27-35 and 36≤ years old; N = 394) showed that age was not a moderator of the effects of political competence on a critical evaluation of manipulated news. However, participants from countries ranked with a higher media literacy context were more likely to spot manipulation in the Internet news reports and reject the promoted standpoint(s). In addition, a puzzling relationship was discovered between spotting and rejecting, as not everyone who spotted manipulation subsequently rejected the manipulated standpoint, but accepted it instead. Also, it transpired that, depending on the country, a certain subtype of manipulated news report - from either 'traditional' or 'alternative' Internet news sources - was regarded by participants of that country as more persuasive and trustworthy. On the whole, the findings of the thesis revealed some important aspects of the relationships between individual skills of critical assessment of news media information and a susceptibility to manipulation effects, on the one side, and political competence and media literacy context, on the other, which collectively contribute to creating a framework for further research in the area.

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Scholars have studied the effects of information on public opinion for many years. Is it time we examined the effects of *dis*information and *mis*information on public opinion formation?

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION.

In 1922, Walter Lippmann published his famous book *Public Opinion* which became a seminal work for researchers in the realms of public opinion and communication. The title of the opening chapter of the book - "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads" - is quite revealing. The main idea of the chapter is that media, and specifically the news media, help their audiences to make sense of the world around them. Moreover, as our direct experience cannot provide us with relevant and reliable knowledge about a great deal of events, phenomena, persons etc., the news media guide us in these labyrinths of uncertainties creating cognitive maps in our heads. We then rely on these maps in our judgments and evaluations of various aspects of social and political reality. Thus, it can be inferred that the news media, and mass media in the widest sense, construct a specific reality for their consumers, a reality which they perceive as realistic, perhaps even for a long period. In effect, Lippmann contended, the constructed reality turns out not to be the real environment but a pseudo-environment which audiences respond to with their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. Yet, all those responses intended intrinsically for that pseudo-environment are, in actual fact, directed towards and manifest themselves in the real world, leading to results of different degrees of justifiability. Lippmann (1922) gave a vivid description of this process:

> In all these instances we must note particularly one common factor. It is the insertion between man and his environment of a pseudo-environment. To that pseudo-environment his behavior is a response. But because it *is* behavior, the consequences, if they are acts, operate not in the pseudo-

> environment where the behavior is stimulated, but in the real environment where action eventuates. If the behavior is not a practical act, but what we call roughly thought and emotion, it may be a long time before there is any noticeable break in the texture of the fictitious world. But when the stimulus of the pseudo-fact results in action on things or other people, contradiction soon develops. Then comes the sensation of butting one's head against a stone wall, of learning by experience, and witnessing Herbert Spencer's tragedy of the murder of a Beautiful Theory by a Gang of Brutal Facts, the discomfort in short of maladjustment. For certainly, at the level of social life, what is called the adjustment of man to his environment takes place through the medium of fictions.
> By fictions I do not mean lies. I mean a representation of the environment which is in lesser or greater degree made by man himself. (pp.19-20)

Much of the later research in psychology, public opinion studies, and communication has corroborated Lippman's foregoing ideas about the pseudo-environment that the news media create. In particular, agenda setting theory was built on and supports his supposition that news media information plays a leading role in the construction of the pictures of reality in our heads. McCombs and Shaw (1972), 'fathers' of the agenda setting theory, demonstrated that the media agenda becomes a public one over time; that is, those issues the news media regard as important and focus on often in their news reports soon turn out to be important for the public, as well. Or as McCombs himself put it:

> Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda setting role of the news media. (p.1)

Research over many years in this realm has repeatedly substantiated the rationale of agenda setting: the news media do not tell us *what to think*, but *what to think about*.

Ten years after McCombs and Shaw's work, political science and communication scholars suggested a new theory which expanded upon the previous one and overcame what

were viewed as its limitations. In particular, in the late 1980s, in attempting to explain how the news media affect their public, Robert Entman drew attention to "an interaction between media messages and what audiences make of them" (1989, p. 349). Unlike McCombs and Shaw, he argued that the media do not just tell us *what to think about* but also *what to think* and *how to think* by means of framing. In simple terms (more discussion on this concept follows in the next chapter), framing can be described as a process by which the specific construction of a message influences how it might be interpreted by its receiver. Or, following Entman's definition, "the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality [and, thus, downplaying other aspects], and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality" (2004, p.26). Thus, journalists or politicians characterize an issue or an object in such a way as to help shape its specific vision for the public, creating, in this fashion, meaningful and understandable pictures of that object or issue in the minds of the public.

In addition, as is apparent, news frames affect the information receivers through priming, which refers to the effect of a certain preceding stimulus or event on how individuals respond to a certain consequent event, issue, or person (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen & Carpentier, 2009). For example, the frame 'terrorist' in a news report might develop associations between Osama bin Laden, Al-Quaeda, the tragedy of the World Trade Center, suicide bombers and so forth, evoking negative feelings. In this way, frames can influence what people think about and how they perceive reality around them (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Moreover, as a number of studies demonstrate, the effects are stronger for situations that are ambiguous or unfamiliar to individuals (for a review, see Roskos-Ewoldsen & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009).

In this way, we are all immersed in the pseudo-environment created by the media through its methods of information management, packing, and presenting, and we should thus deal with this environment very carefully in trying to distinguish what is effectively communicated, whether and what information is omitted, and what is an actual intent of the media communication. It may even be more challenging to separate the husk from the grain when individuals encounter biased or slanted information in the news media. Such information should greatly facilitate the construction not just of a pseudo-reality, or pseudo-environment as Lippmann (1922) put it, but rather of a distorted pseudo-reality; or, stated differently, a pseudo pseudo-reality which audiences once again respond to with their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors that, in turn, manifest themselves not in the pseudo- but in the real world. As a result, disinformed opinions, ill-informed attitudes, and misinformed

behaviors may arise.

All this may pose a threat not only to an individual or certain categories of citizens, but, in a determinate sense, to the very core of democracy. Thus, Paul and Elder (2006) expounded the statement clearly:

> Democracy can be an effective form of government only to the extent that the public (that rules it in theory) is well-informed about national and international events and can think independently and critically about those events. If the vast majority of citizens do not recognize bias in their nation's news; if they cannot detect ideology, slant, and spin; if they cannot recognize propaganda when exposed to it, they cannot reasonably determine what media messages have to be supplemented, counter-balanced, or thrown out entirely. (p. 2)

In this regard, as virtually every piece of news is framed in a certain way, the public also needs to be capable of sorting through the way in which news is framed, thus avoiding being captured by misleading media information that is presented in a particular way so as to exert a certain influence. In effect, news frames fulfill a dual role and facilitate two processes. On the one hand, it might be said that journalists and editors use frames purely for practical purposes - to process large amounts of information quickly, package it concisely, and make it convenient for their audience usage, providing in this way contextual cues for understanding (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). At the same time, reporters and editors adhere to the traditional standards of journalism and principles of good practice, maintaining the necessity to inform in a good and honest manner, not to persuade, and, of course, not to wangle or manipulate information. However, on the other hand and in actual fact, news frames might be as unintentionally inaccurate as they are deliberately misleading, handpicked to exert an intended influence on the audience, thereby supplanting the process of informing with the processes of misinforming or/and persuading.

In addition, the news might not only embrace various forms of frames that differ in their impact on news consumers, but it may also be biased – one-sided, substituting facts with opinions, or tolerating allegations, that is, statements without proof. This bias or slant results not from (or rather not only from) any evil or other deliberate intent, but also from: the educational background of the journalists and news editors; the economic specifics of news media functioning; various restrictions imposed on journalists and editors by time, space, and

resources; the desire to stay competitive in the news market, etc. Whatever the reasons, a news consumer hardly analyzes them every time (s)he encounters biased news. However, the higher the ability of an individual to critically assess media information, the higher the probability that (s)he will not only spot news bias, but also manage to distinguish between the intentionality and inadvertency of that bias, and categorize it one way or another. The last type of capability - categorization - is achievable by virtue of the individual's personal knowledge (for one, as to a news topic or/and a certain ideological slant of a particular news medium), personal experience of dealing previously with various types of news bias, and ordinary verification of the biased information through other news sources. Thus, revealing and categorizing news bias in media reports on domestic or, all the more, local politics is far easier than when it comes to news coverage of unfamiliar topics or topics that are not easily verifiable by ordinary people, and in particular, reporting on foreign affairs. (Such ability should not be confused with a manifestation of the hostile media effect that will be explained in Part 1 of Chapter II).

Indeed, the news media remain the primary source of information about foreign issues for the majority of people, their ‘window on the world’ that fulfills an important function of trying to keep citizens in our globalized world adequately informed. For this reason, individuals construct their reality of far-off lands, various nations, cultures etc. from ‘information pictures’ provided by the media. And the latter frame the information in such a way as to convert unfamiliar images of various nations/cultures/people into familiar and understandable ones for the media audiences and ones that are within their accepted frames of reference. Therefore, as Entman (2004) argued, when reporting about world affairs, it is manifestly impossible to avoid framing.

Nevertheless, an inability to distinguish biased information from balanced information as well as between a news report’s intent to inform from an intent to persuade might make news consumers to accept the report’s standpoint(s) and believe that, say, definitely, some foreign politicians are the Devil incarnate and some of those imprisoned in third countries, even for economic reasons, are to a man innocent and ‘prisoners of conscience’. Or, undoubtedly, some sovereign states are a menace to world peace for a number of reasons and not because of they have vast oil deposits. Or, indisputably, if some armed groups of people are referred to as 'freedom fighters' or 'peaceful protesters', that means they should be respected as good guys, despite the fact that, in reality, they fight their legitimately elected governments and presidents and use armed violence against their fellow citizens. The cited

examples are hypothetical and, perhaps, too global, but there are enough other, less prominent illustrations of biased media coverage of foreign affairs.

Indeed, in characterizing international reporting, scholars repeatedly noted journalistic inaccuracy and sloppiness as well as prevailing opinion over facts in news reports, bias in fact selection, 'management of news', and even stove-piping, such as with that unforgettable CIA report about mythical Iraqi weapons of mass destruction prior to the US invasion of Iraq. Perhaps, one of the most illustrative examples of misinforming and the use of misleading frames is the long-lasting news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the overwhelming majority of studies in different countries content analyzed national media and revealed a noticeable imbalance in favor of the Israelis in news coverage of the conflict (e.g., Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010; Karim, 2003; Moody-Hall, 2002; Saleem, 2002). Thus, Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2010), based on analysis of a number of studies, set striking examples of the biased, slanted toward pro-Israeli position media coverage:

> …a lack of contextual information leaves the motivation of Israelis and of Palestinians ill-defined… Palestinian victims are not personalized. Figures of the numbers of victims are inaccurate. Although more Palestinians are killed, the coverage takes it for granted that there are more Israeli victims… Labelling also favors the Israeli side of the conflict. Journalists write about disputed territories, settlements, terrorists, rather than about occupied territories, colonies or freedom fighters… Finally, the actors cited and reported on are predominantly Israeli, while Palestinian actors are rarely consulted… (p.93)

With that, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, unfortunately, is not the only vivid example of the ongoing misinforming and use of misleading frames in news coverage of international affairs (issues of the intentionality or inadvertency of such practices is not under of consideration here). Thus, Mann (1999), who wrote about media coverage of China, also described the general quality of international news reporting quite pessimistically:

> … reporters do not always get the story right; neither do their editors and publishers. This is especially the case when they report about distant lands and unfamiliar cultures…the readers, who are already conditioned by the prevalent stereotypes, accept the misleading stories as true and

> react accordingly. The consequences can be disastrous media effects are enhanced when the information conveyed in stories in unfamiliar to audience and cannot be readily verified through their personal experiences or competing stories. (p. 102)

Although this succinct and characteristic account was written more than 10 years ago, little has changed since then. The issue of quality in reporting foreign news is still widely debated as it is "thought to be defined largely in terms of Western values, with the main focus on a small, specific part of the world" (Flemish Peace Institute, 2009). So, it is hardly surprising that the expert meeting on 'Transparency in Foreign News Reporting,' held in April 2008 in Rotterdam, drew the deplorable conclusion that in the selection and construction of news items, the picture of 'foreign affairs' displayed to news consumers is filtered, distorted, manipulated, one-sided and simplified (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010).

Thus, the combination of biased media information with specific framing of that information, as Kucherenko and Christen noted (2014), should likely be able "to affect interpretation of media messages and construction of 'foreign' reality by audiences and, in this way, intentionally or not, manipulate people's perceptions and evaluations of foreign objects, issues, persons, and events" (p.52). Accordingly, it should be remembered that, as was discussed earlier, framing contributes not only to the simplification and the convenience of passing on foreign news to audiences and their perception of it, especially, when it comes to unfamiliar topics (that is, playing a helpful role or, according to Chong and Druckman (2007), being construed in positive terms). It also facilitates in shaping the opinions of news consumers about an issue, say, shaping exclusively negative or positive opinions about something or someone (that is, carrying prejudice or being construed in negative terms). In such a case we are dealing with what I call **'manipulated media information'**, that is, one-sided presentation of information which is based on opinions instead of facts and as such contains allegations, causal interpretation(s) of the issue or problem described in the news reports/messages and assignment of responsibility for it. Taken together, all this eventually lead the consumer of such information to drawing incorrect, erroneous conclusions about the issue or problem. In addition, manipulated media information might include emotionally loaded language and/or various framing and reasoning devices, strengthening the overall effects of such information on its consumers.

Of course, there is usually no direct evidence in a manipulated news report of what underlies the manipulation – intentionality, ignorance, or the trivial inaccuracy of news staff.

Still, whatever the reason, manipulated information fulfills the function of not informing but softly persuading (whether always successfully or not is quite a different matter). In respect to foreign news reporting, it means that some individuals, at least, who receive such information will consequently have distorted, as Lippman put it, 'pictures in their heads' – even if for just a short time -- based on that information. This is why it is essential to study its effects on those exposed to this sort of news and, specifically, when the encountered information turns out to be ***completely unfamiliar*** or ***largely unfamiliar*** to them but, at the same time, includes familiar frames, for one, such as 'terrorism,' 'military threat' or 'threat to national security,' 'spread of epidemic disease', 'protest march' or the like.

I have placed an emphasis here on the aspect of the *unfamiliarity* of information as distinct from information which one has received earlier or if still receiving from, at the very least, periodic -- not to mention broad -- media coverage. Therefore, by focusing on something new and unfamiliar, we can rule out already established opinions and attitudes towards the topic in question which, for one, has been long discussed in the news media, or in various political organizations, student clubs, with relatives and friends, etc. Thus, we are able to exclude all those factors that might 'pollute' the original sensitivity of individuals to such information through preexisting beliefs and, hence, reduce their susceptibility to framing or – broader, in this case – manipulated information effects (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). Instead, it is possible to focus on the initial, 'clear' perception of new information which is manipulated. That is, when the audience members encounter media information which is not only totally novel to them, but also uncertain and ambiguous, they *should be* inherently, 'by default', susceptible to various media effects.

When describing effects of framing in such situation, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) pointed out:

> It stands to reason that news accounts addressing a novel issue should be particularly powerful for audiences. If news receivers lack a set of linkages between an issue and diverse or countervailing considerations (as we would expect with a novel issue), news framing should strongly determine how audiences understand the issue. (p. 25)

However, the question is whether audience members *will remain* susceptible immediately after reading/watching/listening to the new information and thinking of it (as well as in the long run, although this is not under investigation in this study). In other words,

the ability of the audience members to spot that media information is manipulated (that is, to reveal that the information is one-sided and biased) as well as to buy into that information (that is, to accept a general standpoint or standpoints promoted in the news report) will depend on their certain individual characteristics. Among these, the aptitude to critically evaluate information arises as the most prominent one. In this sense, an individual's level of political competence, that is, a close engagement with political information, political knowledge and political activity, is expected to induce that aptitude or, at least, have a significant effect on it.

Undoubtedly, in reality, even if the first impression of unfamiliar news did factor into individual's incorrect conclusions about the news object, this might be changed afterwards in a number of ways, for example by getting more information on the issue from the media, conversations with other people, or relying on an opinion leader's viewpoint. Nevertheless, this initial stage of opinion formation is important enough to investigate for several reasons. It might help to understand in a more pure fashion, first, what judgments citizens make *on their own* based only on that new and manipulated information; second, how they come to those judgments, again, *independently*; and third, how robust the judgments are. Also, needless to say, the first impression in such a situation of a foreign issue, person or event, which has arisen from exposure to such information, might sometimes set a seal on subsequent sentiments toward the country, its people, culture, traditions, etc., as described earlier in a news message, thereby promoting stereotyping. In this regard, Tewksbury et al. (2000) found that when a news message contains information novel to the audience, retention of associations between the issue and the individuals' considerations becomes more rooted. Moreover, as he claimed, the effect such news messages exert on audience interpretations immediately after news exposure lasted up to three weeks.

But, irrespective of its duration, the initial effect of a novel news message might be easily reinforced in the short run. Thus, repetition of a particular message over time increases its credibility in the eyes of the message consumers (Koch & Zerback, 2013; Roggeveen & Johar, 2002) - an effect known as the "truth effect". It is noteworthy that the "truth effect" might be equally valid for incorrect or false information. As Kahneman put it in his bestseller *Thinking: Fast and Slow* (2011), "a reliable way to make people believe in falsehoods is frequent repetition, because familiarity is not easily distinguished from the truth" (p. 62).

Consequently, some novel information - either in its initial form or rephrased somewhat differently - can be repeatedly communicated very soon if we are talking about radio or TV broadcasting, or almost immediately if we mean the Internet, which, beyond all

doubt, nowadays plays a prominent role as a convenient source of news, including political and international news, and provides an immediate exchange of information. Thus, for instance, in 2013 in Europe, 61% of Internet users aged 16-24 and 66% aged 25-54 read online news (Internet Use Statistics - Individuals, 2013). Moreover, the open and global nature of the Internet allows virtually anyone to produce, edit, and disseminate news messages/reports around the world not only through social networks or blogs but also by contacting mainstream and local media and offering them exclusive 'hot' or breaking news witnessed – or allegedly witnessed - by the news author. It stands to reason that media more often catch on to the exclusive information than they do not. However, by so doing, editors do not always have enough time to verify the information and communicate it to the public as soon as possible because of a fear that their competitors will report the information first. We might then receive 'the exclusive' which is composed of very manipulated information that, at best, will be corrected later but at the moment of exposure may astonish, bemuse, frighten or anger its receiver. Blogs and social networks are also popular sources of information and news that, by their nature, are subjective, and, for this reason, biased. Political Internet forums or news comment threads often contain allegations and unfounded accusation toward persons, issues and events. All this makes the Internet a fertile ground for the use of manipulated information; purposefully, at times.

In addition, according to the Eurobarometer survey #78 conducted in 2012, the average level of trust in Internet for then 27 Member States of the EU was 35%, with the highest level of trust in Slovakia (56%) and the lowest level of trust in Germany (26%) (Media Use In the European Union, Autumn 2012). Also, another study conducted by the World Internet Project in 2010 in 30 countries and regions involved in the project revealed that more than 40% of Internet users considered only half or less of the information on the Internet as reliable. With that, in all of the reporting countries and regions except for Colombia, more than 25% of users go online to look for news at least daily, including local, national, and international news, and more than half go online for the news at least weekly (The World Internet Project Report, 2010). That is, despite the unreliability issue, the Internet is nevertheless considered an important source of information.

For certain, the impact of novel and manipulated information should be different for different people and under different conditions of exposure to it; generally speaking, this is equally true for any media effects. The specific degree of influence might depend on sundry factors. However, when it comes to the ability of revealing – or spotting – manipulated media information and, as a result, not accepting the standpoint(s) the news report promotes (or

insusceptibility as I term it), it is simply evident that such proficiency should come from an individual's power for the critical assessment of obtainable media information and for drawing independent conclusions on the information by virtue of that critical assessment. Individuals possessing such qualities are expected to be virtually immune to the effects of manipulated media information.

In turn, when speaking of the ability to critically assess media information, we may reasonably assume that individuals, who for reasons of necessity, are dealing with complex, incomplete, and controversial information on a regular basis ought to develop such critical evaluation skills as well. In particular, I hypothesize that persons who are interested in politics and thus 'immersed' in the world of political information and political activity, will have higher levels of political competence. For this reason, they should possess the aforementioned ability to critically evaluate media information and, as a result, to reveal manipulated media information and not buy into it. In fact, as is described in Part 3 of Chapter II, the concept of political competence has many surrogate terms – political sophistication, political awareness, political knowledge, political expertise, etc. However, all of them emphasize the same central component that they are based on – cognitive capacity (e.g., Fiske et al., 1990; Hsu & Price, 1993;Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Goidel et al., 1997; Nelson et al., 1997; Rhee & Cappella, 1997; Guo & Moy, 1998). In particular, political experts possess more developed schemas to make easier and more accurate judgments, better interpret new information, and have a deeper analytic thinking – this can all be referred to as *elaborative information-processing strategies*. In addition, such strategies should not be restricted only to the political domain, but should function identically for nearly any type of information encountered, as its evaluation would take its course according to the same mechanisms and reference points underlying the process of elaborative thinking. Also, as Luskin (1990) points out, "the dependence on intelligence should be greater for political than for many other sorts of knowledge, because politics is more abstract and remote – simply 'harder material' – than, say, sports or cooking" (p.336). Therefore, the level of political competence an individual possesses may be indicative of his/her general cognitive capacities, including information processing strategies and will, thus, be measured in such a way as to educe the aforementioned attributes. For this study, political competence is defined as *the amount of political knowledge, and experience sufficient to process political information, as well as other complex information. As a result of such processing comes a decision as to whether the information received might be trusted at face value or whether it should be verified first before coming to a certain conclusion on it.* In this thesis, the concept of political competence comprises five components combined into one

composite scale: political interest; media use; factual political knowledge; political discussion; and political participation. Thus, the higher score a person will have on the scale, the higher the level of political competence (s)he possesses.

In addition, and likely intrinsic to political competence, the ability to critically assess media information should apparently be influenced by the general media literacy context inherent to a certain social environment which, in this study, is a country. Thus, the Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels, carried out in 2009 in the Member States of the European Union by the Consortium of research institutes on the request of the European Commission, emphasized that the "ultimate focus (and ambition) of media literacy is the development of individual Critical Understanding and citizen participation" (p. 9). Also, it was noted that "Europe's citizens need to be better equipped to understand the media flow and to reveal why a message has been deliberately transmitted in a false or misleading way" (p.9), concluding thus that "the media is the primary (if not the only) vehicle for the diffusion of political and economic self-interest, and the more media literate a society becomes, the less likely it is that individuals and groups will subscribe to (or be seduced by) the specious and the fallacious" (p.9). Alongside this, in the course of investigation, the Study identified two important dimensions within the concept of media literacy – Individual Competencies, based on the idea that the symptoms of media literacy are manifested in the capabilities of the individual, and the Environmental Factors that may encourage or hamper the former. In addition, the Study demonstrated that the development of individual competences is clearly correlated with the state policy on media literacy that is implemented in a given country. Or, as the Study report put it, "there is a broad correlation between individual media literacy competence and the Environmental Factors" (Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels, 2009, p.12).

Therefore, although the Critical Understanding component cannot be measured directly, given its cognitive nature and complexity (it is comprised of semiotic and linguistic capabilities allowing individuals to obtain, use, contextualize, evaluate and analyze information, and making them aware of the information's validity and utility with regard to target goals), it may still be deduced on the grounds of the certain knowledge and/or attitudes individuals have and measured by exposing the individuals to manipulated media information, while afterwards taking their assessments of that information into account. Accordingly, if the Environmental Factors directly affect the Individual Competences, the media literacy environment should also be correlated, in particular with the Critical Understanding component, which it is also likely to predict. Given that, the Study ranked all the Member

States according to their general media literacy levels (except for measuring the Critical Understanding component), different ranking scores should denote different levels of Critical Understanding. Of course, it is conceivable that a good media literacy context nevertheless does not translate into the high media literacy levels of individuals, or that lack of a favorable media environment still is not a serious obstruction for the existence of media literate citizens. However, the Study contends, a positive relationship between the two is supported statistically, and the examples it cites "are likely to be an exception, and not the norm" (Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels, 2009, p.48).

On the basis of all the above, this thesis sought to answer two principal questions: what effects, if any, do individual political competence and media literacy context have on (1) spotting manipulation in Internet news repots on novel issues in foreign affairs, as well as (2) accepting at face value the standpoints introduced by the manipulated news reports. In particular, guided by previous research findings as well as by theory, that were briefly mentioned earlier in this Chapter and will be described in more detail in further appropriate parts of Chapter II of the thesis, I hypothesized that manipulated media information on novel issues of foreign affairs should be spotted easier and its influence should be weaker for citizens with higher levels of political competence due to their assumed ability to analyze information more carefully and think about it more critically. On the same ground, and, specifically, based on the findings of the Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels (2009) and the Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe (2011), I also hypothesized that, entirely in accordance with the statistically supported conclusions of both Studies (2009, 2011), citizens of countries with more favorable media literacy context should be better in critical assessment of manipulated media information, particularly, as to spotting manipulation in news reports on novel issues of foreign affairs, and rejecting a standpoint promoted by such reports, compared to citizens of countries with less favorable media literacy context.

The present study was conducted in three countries with differing overall media literacy ranks – Austria, Italy, and the Netherlands. Given that the age of the heaviest Internet users -- as confirmed in various studies, for instance, the World Internet Project (2010) as well as Eurostat's Internet Use Statistics - Individuals (2013) -- is 16-24 years followed by those in the age group of 25-35 years (and this trend has not changed over the last decade, notwithstanding the fact that the number of users going online for information has grown), the target group of research participants were university students aged 18-26 years old. The status of the participants prompted suggestions that they should be at least formally more

media literate, possess better cognitive skills, and enjoy advanced information processing abilities as compared to the general public and, specifically, those without higher education. To ensure variation within the samples along political competence criteria, students from different departments were recruited to participate in the study. Furthermore, to verify a possible moderating effect of age in the relationship between individual political competence and spotting manipulation in news reports as well as the acceptance/rejection of the manipulated standpoint(s), three age groups of participants were compared against each other in the Italian sample (those aged 18-26, 27-35 and 36 ≤ years old). .

As a result, it appeared that political competence did not affect either the ability to spot manipulation or the acceptance of a manipulated report's standpoint(s). At the same time, the more favorable media literacy context was found to be related both to the higher rates of spotting manipulation and the higher rates of rejecting the standpoint of the manipulated news report. In addition, relationships were examined between informed media mistrust, or media skepticism, as an assumed manifestation of media literacy, on the one hand, and a country's media literacy ranks and individual levels of political competence, on the other. Thus, for the former the relationship was found to be positive, whereas for the latter it proved to be negative. Next, I investigated the effects of the type of Internet news source from which the manipulated news reports originated, namely traditional and alternative media sources, as to whether they were regarded by participants as more or less trustworthy. The results showed that the Dutch participants regarded the version of the news report 'taken' from an alternative Internet news source as more trustworthy, while the Austrians and the Italians considered more trustworthy the version allegedly 'taken' from a traditional Internet news source. Finally, I explored a relationship between more intensive Internet use by participants for gathering news of any kind and the ability to spot manipulated media information as well as to accept the standpoint promoted by the manipulated news report. As a result, a positive relationship was found for the Austrian sample only. Lastly, the expected moderating effects of 'age', which was investigated in the three age groups of the Italian sample, made no difference in this study.

Thus, due to the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis, its findings contribute to more than one academic field and academic discussion. In particular, I would single out the role of political competence in critical assessment of media information (in the fields of political science, political communication, and public opinion); trustworthiness of information obtained from different types of Internet news sources; and the clash between spotting manipulated information and, at the same time, accepting the standpoint(s) it promotes (both

related to media and communication studies and, specifically, media effects, media trust and Internet communication) .

In conclusion, there are three important points that have to be emphasized. First, the concept of manipulated information combines features both of biased media information (which are (1) one-sidedness and (2) allegations/unsubstantiated statements) and negatively framed information (which are (1) causal interpretation of a problem and (2) assigning responsibility for the problem). For this reason, referring to the manipulated media information in terms of 'generally' framed information or 'generally' biased information would be totally conceptually incorrect. By the same token, previous research findings on effects of media frames and media bias should be and were discussed in Chapter II by taking into account the specificity of the double nature of the concept of manipulated media information. Second, the findings of this study cannot be generalizable, of course, as the convenient samples of participants were employed. Nevertheless, some general trends or patterns, consistent in all three countries, were still uncovered and, thus, may be confirmed - or disproved - in further research with random samples. Third, although participants from the countries ranked higher on media literacy showed better scores on spotting manipulated media information as well as on rejection the standpoint the information promoted, one cannot conclude that this resulted only due to the influence of more - or less - favorable media literacy context which each of the three countries had. Notwithstanding the conclusions of the Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels (2009) and the Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe (2011), that indicated the positive relationship between the country's media literacy context and individual media literacy competence, were generally supported by the findings of this thesis, they also implied that some additional unobserved variables existed and affected this positive relationship. Therefore, stating the facts that participants from the countries with more favorable media context showed better results in this study, it is important to keep in mind that some additional contextual factors might have also contributed to the virtual 'ranking' the three countries according to the same order as the media literacy context did, and, eventually, influenced the participants' results with respect to the spotting and rejecting manipulated information.

Overall, the thesis is structured as follows. The next chapter, **Chapter II**, comprises the theory and includes a literature review explicating the main concepts of the study. The chapter is structured into five *Parts*. *Part 1* explains the concepts of biased, framed and manipulated media information. *Part 2* examines how people process media information and what the relationship between the type of information processing and the critical assessment

skills of media information is. *Part 3* analyzes the concept of political competence as used in the study. *Part 4* includes an explanation of the concept of media literacy in broad terms and focuses particularly on the component of the critical assessment of media information. In addition, along with the literature review and the explication of the main concepts used in the study, I provide my own line of reasoning as to how they are applied to this research. Finally, *Part 5* presents and explicates the research questions and the hypotheses this thesis seeks to explore.

Chapter III is focused on the methods used in the research.

Chapter IV contains the results of my empirical investigation.

Lastly, **Chapter V** concludes the thesis.

CHAPTER II. THEORY

Based on a broad literature review, this chapter explains theoretically in which ways manipulated media information might impact upon its consumers as well as factors that can prevent that impact. In addition, the chapter explicates the main concepts of the study. In total, there are four parts to the chapter. *Part 1* explains the concepts of biased, framed, and manipulated media information. *Part 2* examines how people process media information, and what is the relationship between the type of information processing and (1) critical assessment of media information as well as (2) a level of political competence. *Part 3* construes the concept of political competence as used in the study. *Part 4* includes an explanation of the concept of media literacy in broad terms and focuses on an explanation of the variable of media literacy context, based on the Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels (2009) and the Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe (2011). Finally, *Part 5*, starting from the principal research questions of the study, contains the hypotheses and explanatory questions that are tested in the study.

Part 1. Media bias, framing, and manipulated information.

The concept of manipulated media information presented in this part shares some similarities with what might be referred to as media bias as well as framing. In fact, it could be said that manipulated information comprises to a certain extent some characteristics of both of the aforementioned media phenomena. However, such a resemblance should not be mistakenly confused with the unconditional equality or interchangeability of manipulated and biased and/or framed information, for some media information might be biased but not framed in the way as to present a problem definition, indicate its causes and attribute a responsibility (Entman, 1993). On the other hand, some media information might be framed in the way described above but not biased, one-sided, or instead contains different viewpoints on the problem. Thus, for the purpose of making a clear distinction between the concepts, and understanding how media bias and framing relate to manipulated information, it is necessary to take a look at each of the former individually before proceeding to clarification of what constitutes the latter.

2.1.1. Media bias

What is media bias?

Surprisingly enough, despite the fact that, in surveys and scholarly literature, news media is widely viewed as biased (e.g. Mann, 1999; Goldberg, 2002; Alterman, 2003; Groseclose & Milyo, 2005a, 2005b; Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Baron, 2006; Paul & Elder, 2006; Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010), there is no widely agreed upon definition of "bias." Moreover, such definitions are often inconsistently descriptive rather than normative and are focused on various sources or forms of media bias. In other words, the definition not infrequently depends on the approach being used in research (be it content analysis -- which is most often the case -- or individuals' perception of media bias) or even in a particular study.

Thus, Groseclose and Milyo (2005b) defined bias "as an ideological slant that may take a number of forms: Democratic or Republican partisanship; liberal or conservative positions on public-policy issues; or broader assumptions about, say, business corporations or the causes of social, economic, and foreign-policy problems. […] we assume that such a slant, if it exists, is either to the 'left' or to the 'right' (p.306). In addition, the authors considered other lines of judgment of what constitutes bias, such as having an "inherently subjective nature" (p.308) which refers to gatekeeping bias (coverage vs. non-coverage of issues), statement bias (paying attention in a news report on an issue to only one side and ignoring others), or coverage bias (connotation or tone of language). Such an "ideological approach" adopted mostly from American media bias studies, became quite a popular method in media content analysis research, and especially during various election campaigns (e.g. Goldberg, 2002; Adkins Covert & Philo, 2007; Chiang, 2007; Ho & Quinn, 2008; Puglisi, 2011). Groseclose and Milyo (2005b) conceded that the debate over media bias has focused mainly on American reality and taken American viewpoints into account, leaving, thus, the views of the rest of the world more often than not unattended. However, approaches to studying and defining media bias go well beyond the aforementioned 'ideological' or 'partisan' distinction also referred in literature to as a 'supply-side model,' according to which the news media try to increase the electoral prospects of their preferred political party.

Another kind of model is a 'demand-side' one, according to which the media attempt to maximize their profits and, for this reason, supply readers/viewers/listeners with the information they prefer to receive (Baron, 2006). Or, in other words, news consumers choose to get information that confirms and reinforces their beliefs and attitudes (Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005). In such a way, they might be caught in so-called 'echo chambers' trap, being supplied only with preferably slanted information. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) attributed such

behavior to the consequences of information overload. Yet, even when looking for accurate and balanced information, consumers may stick to their prior beliefs. In turn, Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) -- taking the meaning of media bias information slant as the selective omission of facts, specific choice of words, and playing with credibility of primary news sources -- stated that bias emerges not from "consumer preferences for confirmatory information, reporters' incentives to promote their own views, or politicians' ability to capture the media. Instead, it arises as a natural consequence of firms' desire to build a reputation for accuracy, and in spite of the fact that eliminating bias could make all agents in the economy better off" (p.310).

Nevertheless, definitions and descriptions of media bias are not limited to those proposed within the aforementioned two-model classification. In this vein, Mullainathan and Shleifer (2002) distinguished between the ideological bias through which news media try to influence the public and spin bias which serves to make a news report catchy and memorable. Baron (2006) argued that the effects of media bias can be divided into *ex ante* and *ex post* cases. *Ex post* refers to situations when citizens reading news reports take media bias into account and, for this reason, perceive the news skeptically. As a result, they will act with discretion based on what they have read/viewed/listened to. *Ex ante* media bias, in turn, affects the increasing probability of reporting of certain news stories and, thus, the likelihood that citizens will base their behavior on that information. Calais Guerra et al (2011) also noted that one of the most common types of bias is ideological or political, in addition to selection bias (what should be covered) and description bias (truthfulness of news report). Furthermore, the researchers described bias as a lack of appropriate balance and neutrality in argumentation as well as lack of appropriate critical doubt. D'Alessio and Allen (2007) defined media bias as "a systematic, persistent unbalance in mainstream news coverage for the purpose of influencing opinion on key issues" (p.432). At last, according to the *Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (2008):

> …the word *bias* refers to showing an unjustified favoritism toward something or someone. Thus, on a very simplistic level, *media bias* refers to the media exhibiting an unjustifiable favoritism as they cover the news. When the media transmit biased news reports, those reports present viewers with an inaccurate, unbalanced, and/or unfair view of the world around them. (p.433)

In this regard, two types of bias in news reporting were identified in the Encyclopedia (2008): 'partisan bias' implying a certain slant in favor of a particular political party, and 'structural bias' stemming from some 'structural' specifics of the media industry such as time constraints, reporting routines, newsroom practices, focus on sensations, conflicts and negative news, commercial pressures, etc. Bias could also stem from distorted or hidden information presented by primary sources, from the personal preferences of journalists or editors (Baron, 2006), and from the ignorance or low professionalism of reporters (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010).

Such a distinctive feature of media bias as a lack of appropriate balance and neutrality in argumentation has also been specifically emphasized. Thus, D'Alessio and Allen (2007) defined media bias as "a systematic, persistent unbalance in mainstream news coverage for the purpose of influencing opinion on key issues" (p.432). *The Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication* (2011) explained news bias as "a professional lapse in the journalistic goals of impartiality, objectivity and/or balance (regardless of intention)" (p.32). Finally, according to the *Encyclopedia of Political Communication* (2008), the word 'bias' implies:

> …showing an unjustified favoritism toward something or someone. Thus, on a very simplistic level, *media bias* refers to the media exhibiting an unjustifiable favoritism as they cover the news. When the media transmit biased news reports, those reports present viewers with an inaccurate, unbalanced, and/or unfair view of the world around them. (p.433)

Interestingly, according to Goldberg (2002), the news media often do not admit that they are biased. Earlier, Patterson and Donsbach (1996), who surveyed journalists in five western democracies, came to the same conclusion arguing that, generally, journalists denied the existence of any bias in their reporting and instead stated "that their decisions are premised solely on professional norms" (p.466). However, in some surveys (e.g., Pew Research Center, 2004) journalists themselves agreed that news reports were often sloppy and error-filled, and that they, journalists, often showed their political bias in the reports.

Thus, if one tries to summarize various definitions and descriptions of media bias in one word, it would likely be 'unbalance', a notion which can then be accompanied by a range of attributes: unbalance of facts, unbalance of viewpoints, unbalance of words, unbalance of sources, etc. When speaking of 'unbalance', I imply the essence of the term 'media bias', not the perception of information as biased by its consumers - I will cover the peculiarities of

perception below when reasoning about bias effects. Besides, those who are convinced that the notion of balance/unbalance cannot exist without perception should consider, for one, media information on a controversial issue that contains one viewpoint only.

Effects of media bias

Essentially, the lack of agreement among scholars on a universal definition of media bias is not a serious obstacle for studying how individuals perceive such biased media information and what influence, if any, it might exert on them. In his book *How We Know What Isn't So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life* Thomas Gillovich (1993) stated:

> Inaccuracies and fabrications propagated by the media are a particularly powerful cause of people's erroneous beliefs, in part because of the reputation much of the media have for objectivity and accuracy, a reputation that is not always deserved. The prescription that "you cannot believe everything you read" has unfortunately not been adequately incorporated into the public consciousness. It often seems overshadowed by the counter-slogan that "they couldn't say it if it wasn't true. (p.99)

In this regard, An et al (2012) noted that "traditional media outlets are known to report political news in a biased way, potentially affecting the political beliefs of the audience and even altering their voting behaviors". Della Vigna and Kaplan (2007a) found that media bias had a significant effect on voting, at least in the case of Fox News. Effects of media bias in fostering political polarization, voting outcomes as well as electoral mistakes (defined by Bernhardt et al. (2008) as "an outcome in which media bias matters, i.e. the candidate, who would be preferred by the majority if all voters received unbiased news" (p.1093)) were revealed in a number of studies by Glynn (1999), Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006), Bernhardt et al (2008), Chiang and Knight (2009). Druckman and Parkin (2005) also stated they found compelling evidence of editorials slant impact on voters' decisions. Moreover, they concluded: "Our results raise serious questions about the media's place in democratic processes" (p.1030).

Other scholars, however, pointed out that individuals differ in their perception of media bias. In this regard, Della Vigna and Kaplan (2007b), for example, noted that if voters were aware of possible media bias presented in news reports and sorted it out from plain facts, their

beliefs and attitudes are not affected by the slanted information. D'Alessio (2003) also emphasized that "people who consider news media biased are less likely to believe them and to use them, with obvious consequences both for people and for media" (p.282). In other words, the attitude or feeling such individuals possess typifies what is called *media skepticism* or "a subjective feeling of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media" (Tsfati, 2003, p. 67). Explaining the definition in detail, Tsfati specified:

> ...media skepticism is the feeling that journalists are not fair or objective in their reports about society and that they do not always tell the whole story. It is the feeling that mainstream news outlets will sacrifice accuracy and precision for personal and commercial gains. It is the perception that one cannot believe what one reads in the newspaper or sees on TV news. In other words, media skepticism applies the general concept of mistrust to audience perceptions of the way mainstream news institutions function in society. (p. 67)

Such mistrust presumes that news media do not represent the world in the correct way, and, for this reason, opinions expressed in the media cannot be relied upon and accepted by the audience (Tsfati, 2003). Despite the reference to mainstream media specifically, and given that during last decade alternative media (such as social networks and blogs) have boomed, the foregoing quote about media skepticism should also be applied to these new forms of media as well (to a greater or lesser extent, perhaps).

What is important to take note of here is the necessity of distinguishing between two types of media skepticism – one that we can call 'healthy' and the second that we can call 'subjective' media skepticism. The former may be referred to as *'informed media mistrust'* and is an inherent part of critical thinking skills of a media literate person. Such *informed media mistrust* should exist *a priori* toward all media as a whole, not merely toward a particular news report a person is reading/watching/listening to at a specific moment. In particular, *informed media mistrust* is expected to stem from and be based on the following premises:

- the knowledge that media messages may have multiple meanings and pursue specific purposes (Wicks, 2001);

- the ability also to recognize that media messages might exert a certain influence on news consumers and anticipate to what degree such influence is possible (Aufderhide, 1993);

- the understanding that media construct social reality; that they may be ideologically and politically biased; that they are concerned with profits which, in turn, affects the choice of what to report as well as the forms in which news information is presented; that it is impossible to give any 'objective picture of reality' in a given news report due to constraints on time and resources as well as the infeasibility of presenting in that report the standpoints of all parties involved in the issue described.

That is why, rephrasing Kinder (1998), critically thinking individuals should be somewhat uncertain about practically everything, and specifically about remote and not directly observed facts. Such *informed media mistrust*, as I call it, should be viewed, thus, as an unexpendable quality of the critical intellect and welcomed in every possible way.

As distinct from the foregoing type of media mistrust, there is another form of mistrust - *contextual* or *situational (ad hoc) media mistrust*, as I refer to it. Such situational mistrust pertains not to all the media taken together but to concrete media outlets or/and particular media messages, and is reflected in the fact that individuals perceive such media outlets/messages to be biased against the individuals' viewpoints. D'Alessio (2003) described the subjective perception of media bias as idiosyncratic and even noted the opposing judgments different people came to after looking at identical media content. In addition, he argued, bias is relativistic in the sense that content is perceived as biased when it contradicts the views or beliefs of readers/viewers, regardless of whether they are aware of their own biases or even if the content is balanced.

The latter point supports the conclusions of Vallone, Ross and Lepper (1985) who found that neutral media content is perceived as biased due to selective perception, and called this phenomenon 'the hostile media effect' or 'hostile media perception' (in abbreviated form, HME or HMP). According to this, the receiver of a news message shapes the meaning of the message themselves in accordance with their positions on an issue that they are reading about. HME might arise not only with regard to political issues, but also religion, sport, controversial topics covered by the news media, etc. (Vallone et al, 1985; Gunter et al, 2001; Christen et al, 2002; Arpan & Raney, 2003; Ariyanto et al, 2007; Richardson et al, 2008). Notwithstanding that the inner workings of HME are still called into question, a number of scholars regard as a key attribute a person's involvement with the issue covered in a given news report. Such involvement may be due to the salience of the issue, its personal relevance, or/and as a result of person's own political/ideological partisanship (Christen et al, 2001; Gunter & Christen, 2002; Christen & Gunter, 2003). Or, as this mechanism of HME is explained within the framework of Social Judgment Theory, "people process issue statements relative to their own

positions: statements close to one's own position fall within a 'latitude of acceptance' and are judged as agreeable, while positions substantially different are grouped into 'latitude of rejection' (D'Alessio, 2003, p.283). Consequently, those statements in media messages falling into the latitude of rejection are more likely to be regarded as "biased" compared to opposite statements.

As one can readily see, those susceptible to HME are inclined to be skeptical towards media outlets and news reports and also see slant in media messages only contextually, depending on a situation, and only when the standpoint of the media outlet or report contradicts their own standpoints. It is worth mentioning that HME does not refer to news reports that propagate only one point of view on an issue or problem, or to put it differently, when other viewpoints are lacking. What it refers to is the supposed predominance through the whole of a report of a standpoint which is opposite to "mine", that is some "distortion of truth" of which "I am" securely certain. Further, following this string of logic, if one believes there are specifically biased media outlets/news, then he or she should also believe that there must also be unbiased ones as well, that is, those supporting her/his own views and beliefs. Moreover, such a person likely believes that position that he or she adheres to on an issue is the only correct one. In this way, the person also appears to be unaware of his or her own biases and takes little account of whether the particular news medium or report which communicates standpoints fully supporting his or her own opinion still conforms to journalistic norms of impartiality, by presenting different points of views, telling the story in context, giving facts instead of solely opinions or allegations, etc. All this can hardly suggest that such a person could be described as critically thinking. It can be said that manifestations of selective media mistrust and, consequently, selective media trust do not mix well with manifestations of informed media mistrust, as the latter presumes the existence of a skeptical attitude towards the impartiality of the media as a whole. Otherwise, if contextual media mistrust is typical of any population groups, irrespective of their critical thinking abilities and attitudes towards the media, then the whole concept of media literacy, and specifically the critical assessment of media information, appears to be completely far-fetched and should not make any sense along with a practical application.

According to Paul and Elder (2006), this difference between the two types of news consumers described above arises from the lack or the presence of what they referred to as "intellectual humility", or knowledge of our ignorance. The gist of this lies in distinguishing between reading a media message and verifying the truth of the message. To be more precise, a critical news consumer is aware that information presented in a news report as factual may

actually not be factual at all. Instead, it might be propaganda, distorted information or misinformation. For that reason, knowing that he or she personally does not know these facts, the critical news consumer "brackets" what he or she reads, sees, and hears, and "suspends" his or her beliefs on an issue. The information is, thus, taken into account on a preliminary basis ("perhaps this is true, perhaps not"). In contrast, an uncritical news consumer will accept or reject a news message's standpoint(s) in accordance with the dominant opinion on an issue in his or her social environment. Thus, Paul and Elder (2006) concluded, such uncritical news consumers "take themselves to be in possession of the TRUTH. This confidence is in fact proof of their lack of objectivity" (p.7). Unfortunately, as the authors stated, intellectual humility does not prevail in life.

In brief, the distinction between an uncritical and critical perception of biased media information may be expressed in the following tacit maxims adapted from Paul and Elder (2006) and summarized here in tabular form (Table 1):

Table 1. Characteristics of uncritical and critical minds

Uncritical Mind	Critical Mind
"It's true if I believe it *(for some reasons)*"	"I believe it, but it may not be true"
"It's true if we *(a group – social, political, religious etc.)* believe it *(for some reasons)*"	"We believe it, but we may be wrong"
"It's true if we *(a group – social, political, religious etc.)* want to believe it *(for some reasons)*"	"We want to believe it, but we may be prejudiced by our desire"
"It's true if it serves our *(group's – social, political, religious etc.)* vested interest to believe it *(for some reasons)*"	"It serves our vested interest to believe it, but our vested interest has nothing to do with the truth"

Detecting media bias

How bias is detected in media texts and broadcasting through content analysis will not be considered here, for a description of the specifics of content analyzing media messages is not a purpose of my work, which is focused upon individual perception of media information and the individual critical thinking skills employed to assess it. Eventually, detecting media bias by ordinary people suggests using strictly clear practical techniques that should be effective in terms of time- and cognitive effort, which is by no means unimportant in the present day of information overload. Reasoning from this fact, different authors have

proposed different methods for spotting slanted information, which may vary but also have much in common with each other and promote a consistent approach for asking critical questions while assessing and interpreting the news.

Specifically, Paul and Elder (2006) developed a set of key questions news consumers should ask when they are exposed to various news reports:

- What is the intended audience?
- What point of view is being privileged?
- What point(s) of view is (are) being dismissed or downplayed?
- How can I gain access to the point of view being negated (from those who most intelligently understand it)?
- Which stories are featured "on the front page" and why?
- What information is "buried" in the news report and why?

In addition, of course, Paul and Elder (2006) do not regard merely an awareness of these questions as a panacea against media bias, but also emphasize the necessity of learning to read, view, and hear the news critically in addition to knowing how the media operate and why.

Lee and Solomon (1991) proposed an extended set of questions for news consumers to ask in order to spot possible bias in the news:

- What are the sources of the news report? Is there only one or are there several sources?
- From whose point of view is the news reported?
- Is there a lack of diversity of sources and viewpoints?
- Are there double standards in describing different groups of people, countries, etc.?
- Are there stereotypes in the news reports?
- What are the unchallenged assumptions?
- Is the language loaded?
- Is there a lack of context in the news report?
- Do the headlines and stories match?
- Are stories on important issues featured prominently?

In turn, Baker (1994) suggested how to identify different types of bias in news reports. Notwithstanding the fact that he wrote specifically about "liberal bias", his classification remains useful and valid for any form of bias. In total, he categorized eight types of media bias:

1. Bias by commission.
2. Bias by omission.
3. Bias by story selection.
4. Bias by placement.
5. Bias by selection of sources.
6. Bias by spin.
7. Bias by labeling.
8. Bias by policy endorsement or condemnation.

Bias by commission is the most common form of bias (Baker, 1994) and refers to the inclusion in a news report of only one specific opinion or a viewpoint on an issue or/and details supporting only this opinion/viewpoint. In addition, Baker (1994) stated, portraying in a news report one viewpoint as the correct one also falls into a category of bias by commission.

Bias by omission is, in actual fact, the reverse side of bias by commission and involves ignoring important opinions or viewpoints on the issue reported. This sort of bias might be difficult to spot. It requires from a news consumer to be knowledgeable about the subject of the news. In this way, either by knowing different points of view on the issue from the beginning or by comparing news coverage of the subject by different media outlets it is possible to detect bias by commission.

Bias by story selection, as its name implies, refers to choosing a topic to be covered or a specific news report to be published.

Bias by placement, evidently, means that news stories on the first pages of the print media or at the beginning of television or radio newscasts are judged as more significant and important than those left for later. Also, what are considered as the most important facts are usually published first in the story and less important ones are reported subsequently. Given that most people usually read only the headlines or first paragraph(s) (Baker, 1994), bias by placement within the news report might be quite an influential technique.

Bias by selection of sources happens when information is supplied by those who support one viewpoint or another. In addition, this bias is observed when one reads or hears such

phrases as “experts believe that” or “the majority of people think that,” etc. Baker (1994) warned that quoting an expert by name does not necessarily makes a news story more credible, for the reporter may choose anyone he or she wants as an “expert”. The same is true when asking opinions of “people on the street”. In this case, the reporter might easily load the story with testimony that would support a particular point of view.

Bias by spin refers to emphasizing in a report some aspects of an issue favorable for one party concerned while downplaying unfavorable aspects, or promoting that party’s interpretation of an event when only briefly mentioning or completely ignoring the interpretation of the opposite side.

Bias by labeling means attaching some labels to describe people, processes, and events. For example, describing someone as either a “terrorist” or “freedom fighter” has different connotations and will provoke different meanings for the news consumer, in the same way as the use of positive or negative words (e.g., adjectives, adverbs).

Bias by policy recommendation or condemnation occurs when a reporter does not only communicate the facts, sequence or description of events but also endorses some government action or policy or, alternatively, condemns them. In other words, this type of bias may be seen when a reporter peremptorily evaluates particular policies or actions while providing no attribution.

According to Baker (1994), many news stories often contain several types of bias. For example, a news report displaying bias by commission might also include bias by selection of sources and bias by labeling. By the same token, bias by story selection is likely accompanied by bias by placement.

Complimentary to the above, other types of biases were also identified, such as bias by statistics (reporting “two-thirds of respondents think that…” in reality may mean that only three persons were surveyed for this question); bias by headlines (setting the tone and programming the perception of a news report from the beginning); bias by photos, captions and camera angles (making someone or something look favorably or unpleasantly, or giving a dramatic shot and, thus, programming a news consumer to have a specific perception of a news report) (Media Awareness Network www.media-awareness.ca). As likely as not, there exist more kinds of bias that have been identified, for example, bias by type and size of font, or bias by a reporter’s silence in a newscast or some other sort of bias. However, while all questions intended to help in identifying media bias and offering descriptions of its various types make sense and are very likely useful for bias researchers, the practical utility of the proposed methods for ordinary people who are attempting to spot media bias easily and

without lengthy contemplation is somewhat doubtful.

For example, would it be possible to answer questions such as “what point(s) of view is (are) being dismissed or played down?” and “what information is 'buried' in the news report and why?” without knowing what are the existing viewpoints on an issue and what all the available information is? To answer these questions, as Baker (1994) noted, it is necessary either to possess background knowledge on the issue or to carry out a sort of brief comparative research study by reading various news outlets in order to come to a certain conclusion. The same holds for identifying bias by omission: how should one know what specifically is omitted in a news report? The question “is there a lack of context in the news report?” may likely be answered differently by different persons, as for them the phrase “lack of context” might have various meanings. Detecting bias by story selection, at least, requires knowledge of which other topics were considered by editors for coverage, as well as which other news reports on the chosen topic for publishing/broadcasting. Finally, to be able to spot some types of bias in a particular news story (say, bias of double standards, or featuring stories on important issues prominently), one needs to consume news on a continuous basis and, moreover, from various news media, working thus like a media monitoring agency. However, ordinary people often have no time for verifying news reports and/or the willingness to become news junkies. Another question arises: how to deal with spotting bias in foreign reporting, especially when it comes to news coverage of some novel topics or on unfamiliar issues? Or, given that at the present day boom in the Internet and mobile means of communication, reading, viewing or listening to the news from other countries has become commonplace, how, if at all, one can spot bias in reports in the news media of a foreign country without knowing the specifics of how its media system functions? Of course, this is a topic for further research in its own right, but what seems important is that the fundamentals of media bias remain the same irrespective of the particular media system or particular country.

Evidently, the very concept of media bias should be elaborated and specified more clearly, including making its components unambiguous and well-defined for use in research. In the same vein, this applies to the elaboration of the practical methods for spotting media bias that, it would seem, should be simplified, summarized to most differential characteristics of bias and unified for usability purposes. Having such a helpful "memo" will most likely prove to be a handy tool in a quick analysis of news messages for bias.

2.1.2. Framing

> Artists know that the frame placed around a painting can affect how viewers interpret and react to the painting itself. As a result, some artists take great care in how they present their work, choosing a frame that they hope will help audiences see the image in just the right way. Journalists – often subconsciously – engage in essentially the same process when they decide how to describe the political world. They choose images and words that have the power to influence how audiences interpret and evaluate issues and policies (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009).

The quotation cited above refers specifically to the use of framing in news reports. However, the concept of framing itself has been investigated in many branches of the social sciences, including cognitive psychology, sociology, political science, and communication. But, although the interpretations of the concept share some similarities – and quite considerable at times – across various disciplines, its treatment varies from field-to-field reflecting differences in their focuses, approaches, preferences, and limits with regard to the study of framing. For this reason, no common unified definition of the notion, unfortunately, exists; however, in general terms, all disciplines are agreed on a broad definition of framing "as information that conveys different perspectives on some event or issue" (Iyengar, 2010).

Certainly, for a particular study a broad description of a concept is not applicable. However, before presenting a specific and more precise definition that will be used for this study, it is necessary to try to explain the discrepancies and inconsistencies in the treatment of the concept by examining its roots and attributes as well as distinguishing framing effects from similar ones, a confusion that often arises. Such scrutiny should allow us to see the concept in its pure form, distinguishing it from similar concepts and, eventually, ending up with a clear view of the phenomenon and a clear-cut and unambiguous conceptual definition.

Disciplinary roots of framing and resembling effects

Discussing different approaches to the interpretation and application of the framing concept, scholars have for long denoted its sociological and psychological roots as well as the frequent mistaking of framing effects with agenda-setting and persuasion effects (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Krosnick, 1991; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Shah et al., 1996; Nelson et al., 1997b; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Pan & Kosicki, 2005; Shah et al., 2009). Recently, in their lucid explanation of the theoretical foundations of framing, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009)

pointed out two important distinctions underlying variant treatment of framing by different scholars. One of the distinctions refers to *disciplinary origins*, and the other pertains to *explanatory models*.

The disciplinary origins of framing imply micro-level or psychological approaches and macro-level or sociological approaches. The latter is based on attribution theory as well as frame analysis. The attribution theory, as stated by Heider (1959), declares that people make judgments about the complex world around them by linking an observed outcome and potential cause, thus attributing responsibility to personal or societal factors. Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic frames in political news, when issues are considered at the level of particular events or persons or at the level of society and when responsibility is assigned to individuals or to society at large, respectively, reflects this approach. The frame analysis rests upon Goffman's (1974) assumption that people rely on interpretive schemas called "primary frameworks" rather than on causal attributions. According to his viewpoint, primary frameworks represent sets of categories that are established and shared within society and that are usually employed by individuals when they process information. In addition, society itself as well as the media utilizes frames targeted to involve the very primary frameworks and, therefore, facilitate specific interpretations of messages by citizens.

The micro-level or psychological approach, which underlies this study, is based on Kahneman and Tversky's (1979, 1984) idea that interpretation of a message usually depends on what interpretive schemas are used by individuals (more on this follows in Part 2 of this Chapter). In turn, specific frames might facilitate specific interpretations. Moreover, the same message framed in different ways might give rise to different interpretations. The study by Nelson et al (1997a) provides a good example of the last statement. In this study people were asked whether they would allow the Ku Klux Klan to conduct a rally by being asked to judge from one of two frames – free speech (that is, everybody has a right to speak) or public safety (that is, the possibility of violent confrontation between proponents and opponents of such a hate group). As a result, those exposed to the free speech frame were more inclined to allow the rally than those exposed to the public safety frame.

The second important dimension influencing different interpretations of the concept by scholars is explanatory models. Given that "news frames can exert a relatively substantial influence on citizens' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors," Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009, p. 19) claimed, "it is not surprising that they appear to be related to other consequential processes in news consumption and processing." In particular, there are three other processes

and effects to some degree resembling framing effects and quite possibly concurrently accompanying them: *agenda-setting effects, information effects*, and *persuasion effects*. They ought to be succinctly considered in order to demonstrate psychological processes underlying the distinct effects and, therefore, differences and similarities between them leading us, in this way, to a better understanding of the nature of framing.

Generally speaking, agenda-setting deals with *what* is reported in the media whereas framing refers to *how* this issue is reported. In other words, topics most often discussed in the media are perceived by the audience as the most important. However, the central organizing ideas of news reports on those topics will affect how the reports are interpreted by the audience members. Nevertheless, some scholars have suggested that framing effects are merely an extension of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2004), specifically the second-level of agenda setting which refers to selecting the particular attributes of issues, thus, making them more salient, and presenting them to the public. In such a way, the second-level of agenda setting resembles framing very closely in that the latter makes some aspects of reported reality more salient for the purposes of promoting a definite "problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). That is why framing researchers contend that framing is distinct from agenda setting procedurally as well as conceptually (Kosicki, 1993; Maher, 2001); moreover, the opposite is also true – agenda setting borrows considerably from framing (e.g., Shah at al., 2009).

In this regard, an explanation of the differences between framing and agenda setting provided by Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) in their review deserves close attention. The main distinction claimed lies between two important psychological characteristics determining agenda setting or framing effects – *accessibility* and *applicability*, respectively. While frequent repetition of information/news about an issue increases its accessibility and, hence, makes it more important for the audience (that is, it sets the agenda for thinking), packaging the information/news in a specific way through choosing particular ideas, words, catchphrases, and images is targeted at making those elements applicable to the issue and, hence, facilitates the interpretation of the issue in an intended direction, "telling audiences what to think, not just what to think about" (Shah et al., 2009, p. 85). Interestingly, though, accessibility and applicability usually complement each other while individuals are processing information. Thus, on the one hand, the more accessible some information is in the memory, the higher the chances that it will be employed for interpretation of an issue. By the same token, the higher the applicability of the elements of the information to the issue, the greater

the likelihood that they will be used while evaluating the issue. I will examine the concepts of accessibility and applicability later on in this part when considering priming, and in more detail in Part 2, devoted to information processing.

The information effects refer simply to presenting new information about an issue, event or person and the acquiring of that information by individuals. Framing does not imply learning something new from messages. Frames promote the building of specific associations between information described in messages and related concepts in the memory of the receivers of the messages. Being a central organizing idea of a message, as Gamson and Modigliani (1987) put it, a frame integrates all information elements together into a package that may affect the audience. Therefore, framing effects relate not to learning new information but to how information is packaged and presented (Druckman, 2002; Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997b), "when a phrase, image or statement suggests a particular meaning or interpretation of an issue" (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009, p. 20).

Finally, persuasion effects differ from framing effects ones in that the former seek to affect and change attitudes and opinions regarding an issue, event or person by overtly presenting strong arguments or evidence to this purpose (Chaiken & Trope, 1999); as such, the one being persuaded usually knows or, at least, can guess about the intentions of the persuader. On the other hand, the latter is usually covert (in the sense that people are often unaware of frames and their possible influence) and concerned with how the information will be interpreted, that is, what inferences and opinions audience members will come to *by themselves* after reading the framed information. At the same time, persuasion and framing share important similarities as to influencing people's attitudes in an intended direction as well as placing emphasis on source credibility as one important moderator of both effects (Druckman, 2001). This resemblance might become even closer if message frames are accompanied by the use of biased information. In such a case, the exerted influence is likely to be more persuasive than when biased information is not involved. For this reason, I would take the liberty of calling this form of influence *soft persuasion*. I will give a detailed account of this issue later in this Part, considering how both frames and biased information on a novel, directly non-verifiable subject matter might complement each other in exerting directional influence on audience members.

Definitions and types of framing

There are various definitions of framing employed by different scholars in the field of political science and communication. Chong and Druckman (2007), stated that "framing

refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (p.104). Scheufele (1999) distinguished between *media frames* and *individual/audience* frames, where the former represent "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani 1987, 143), whereas the latter refers to mental schemas used for organizing and processing information. In addition, media frames influence individuals' frame through audience exposure to media information and the increasing accessibility and applicability of certain frames (this will be discussed below). In turn, Druckman (2001a, 2001b, 2004) differentiated between *equivalence* or *valence* and *emphasis* or *issue* frames. The first type is based on Kahneman and Tversky's research in which equivalent information was presented differently, in terms of gains or losses, associated, in turn, with positive or negative outcome or, according to Druckman (2004), "casting the same information in either a positive or a negative light" (p.671). The second type of frames deals with focusing attention on a narrow aspect of a certain issue.

But, probably, the most widely recognized is the definition by Entman (1993):

> Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe. (p.52)

To frame political issues, it is necessary to fulfill in news coverage at least two of the four functions, namely, the assignment of responsibility and recommendation of a solution. Proposing, thus, the causes and the remedies of the issue by the means of such frames, news media give to the audience ready and easy to grasp templates for estimation of the issue. Ten years later, Entman (2004) described framing as "the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality" (p.26). He argued that frames primed citizens' responses "by activating associations between the information highlighted in the text and concepts already stored in their schema systems" (Entman, 2004, p.28).

It should be noted that some researchers are skeptical about the foregoing definition; but, it must also be admitted that nothing more deserving of attention has been offered in return. For example, Pan and Kosicki (2005) criticized Entman's conception of framing for

several reasons. The critics claimed that it does not take into account the role of individuals' cognitions, is not treated as a phenomenon distinct from other theories such as media bias, gatekeeping and the like, and is also based on the associative network model of memory, neglecting other cognitive models. As a result, on the one hand, framing turns out to be a sort of 'magic bullet' of media influence, while, on the other hand, it is "a catch-all label with no well-defined empirical domain" (Pan & Kosicki, 2005, p. 177). Instead, they conceptualized framing as "a process of making sense in public deliberation" through selecting and adopting by individuals "an interpretive framework for thinking – and potentially, talking – about a political object" (p.177).

Here I would like to dissect the criticism, to enable further understanding of the concept and its application to this study. For one thing, although Pan and Kosicki's remarks are not groundless, at the same time they are not entirely accurate. First of all, Pan and Kosicki's (2005) definition of framing refers directly to the political domain, narrowing thus the applicability of the term. Secondly, as Chong and Druckman (2007) noted, framing "can be viewed as a strategy to manipulate and deceive individuals [that is, considered in negative terms], or it can refer more neutrally to a learning process in which people acquire common beliefs [that is, considered in positive terms]" (p.120). Therefore, in light of the two different functions which framing fulfills (that is, facilitating either positive 'informing' or negative 'persuading'), it seems quite problematic to have an inclusive definition for both. Thus, to be more precise, Pan and Kosicki's definition of framing might be regarded as describing the phenomenon in positive terms (helping to inform), whereas Entman's definition best describes framing in negative terms (helping to persuade). For this reason, the two definitions simply describe different functions of framing.

Also, the so-called disregard for individuals' cognitions in Entman's (1993) definition of framing may be explained simply by not focusing on frames processing but on frames setting. But, let us be candid: there is no definition which takes into account all elements of the framing process in their entirety, including frames building, frames setting, frames processing, and frames effects, not to speak of frames' positive/negative valence. In substance, all and sundry of conceptual and operational definitions proposed by framing scholars differ not only with respect to their underlying assumptions, but also depending upon whether framing is treated as an independent or as a dependent variable (that is, how frames become established in societal discourse and compete for adoption by citizens, and how frames effect audiences, respectively). Besides, such definitions often suffer from conceptual overgeneralization and, therefore, there is even less clarity than for those that are more narrowly conceptualized.

On the other hand, all accusations that the definition is a "catch-all label", akin to a 'magic bullet' of communication effects, and based solely on the accessibility model of memory seem indefensible. First of all, Entman (2004) as well as many other scholars (e.g., Iyengar and Kinder,1987; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009) agree that framing effects occur through priming which, in turn, is based, by its nature, as I will show later, on the availability, accessibility, applicability, activation, and strength of ideas associated with message frames. Next, a notional 'catch-all label' might be employed for the characterization of any other definition of framing, as I showed earlier. Finally, there are no premises for viewing framing in the form in which it is described as yet another a type of 'magic bullet': frames do affect people but, at the same time, the effects are different for different people under different conditions and with different frames.

I settled upon this critique purposely. First, in my opinion, and as I tried to demonstrate before, Entman's (2004) definition of framing as selecting some aspects of an issue and making them more salient, thus downplaying other aspects, and in this way influencing an interpretation and evaluation of that issue mirrors the essence of the concept, and, specifically, its psychological component. It should be emphasized that this definition differs from earlier ones of bias by commission and omission, since such types of bias do not include the salience component but only mention the viewpoints of one interested party and ignore the opinions of the other(s). Second, Entman's (1993) 'older' widely cited definition of framing (as regards problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation) suits in the best way possible the description of negatively constructed frames, that is, frames employed for the manipulation and deception of individuals (Chong and Druckman, 2007). Given that manipulation and deception are not only an incidental product of journalists' and editors' carelessness, sloppiness or ignorance but, quite possibly, a conscious process as well, one might easily suggest intentionality in the use of such frames in the media and elite discourse, particularly. And, third, both mentioned definitions of framing are important for this study as the concept of manipulated information is partly based on them.

Framing devices

Before everything else, frames organize, accompany and strengthen news information and serve as the *keynote* of that message. As a vivid instance of the latter, we might mention Entman's (1991) study of how the U.S. media framed the shooting down of the Korean Airline and Iran Air aircrafts in the 1980s. In both cases, military errors caused the crashes of

civilian planes and deaths of many people. However, the Iran Air crash that the United States was responsible for was framed in terms of "a technical problem", while the Korean Airline crash that the Soviet Union was responsible for was described as "a moral outrage" (p. 6). (Within the proposed framework of manipulated information, the coverage would combine the employment of biased (prejudiced) information with allegations.) In addition, Entman (1991) argued that "in these two cases the news frame coincided closely with the [U.S.] administration's interests" (p. 25).

Certainly, not only the keynote of a message is utilized to frame it in a specific way. To frame media messages, journalists often use *rhetorical structures*, which were subdivided by Gamson and Lash (1983) as "framing and reasoning devices" Under the former, the scholars included special stylistic structures that provided frameworks within which a problem could be viewed: catchphrases, depictions, exemplars, metaphors and visual images. Catchphrases represent expressions that create a specific image (e.g., someone is a flip-flopper - a description of a person who changes his or her opinion too often). Depictions assume using lexical devices for descriptions - examples, modifiers or similes (e.g., he looks like an angry bull). Exemplars are illustrations of a discussed category (e.g., Jack the Ripper - as an example of a murderous maniac). Metaphors describe one idea by means of another (e.g., 'the Axis of Evil' is used to denote countries supporting terrorism or potentially dangerous to global security). Visual images are pictures or graphics accompanying articles. Reasoning devices - such as appeals to principle, consequences and roots - suggest that justifications or reasons are provided for certain positions. Appeals to principle imply the use of moral appeal. Consequences depict potential results. Roots explain causes of events (Gamson & Lasch, 1983).

Using such devices, the media encourage people to think about events in analogous ways. For example, Spellman and Holyoak (1992) noted frames that were used during the first conflict in the Persian Gulf when Iraq was compared to Nazi Germany in World War II and Saddam Hussein was compared to Adolf Hitler. This suggested a clear analogy as to why the conflict was disastrous and what consequences might be expected without stopping Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

In addition to those described above, there might be other rhetorical techniques "that manipulate information in order to influence how the public responds to issues and candidates" (Silverblatt, 2008, p. 350). Just to name a few:

- *Innuendo* (a form of attacking opponents or an opponent's viewpoint by raising doubts yet without giving any evidence at the same time).
- *Misrepresenting someone's position and presenting it so that it will be likely rejected by news consumers.*
- *Downplaying unpleasant and damaging evidence.*
- *Supporting someone's position with unsubstantiated incriminating evidence against opponents.*
- *Taking someone's words out of context.*
- *Attacking the person / organization / institution instead of her/his/its arguments* (Silverblatt, 2008).

Relying on frames when exposed to novel issues

It is not infrequent that individuals encounter messages on novel issues. In such instances, there are no linkages between a given issue and a person's established opinions about it. In such cases, news framing should be expected to have a strong impact on people's understanding of the issue. Therefore, framing effects of news reports on novel issues "should be particularly powerful for audiences" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009, p.25). First impressions from such reports on foreign affairs might set a seal on subsequent judgments about, say, a foreign country, its people, culture, traditions, etc. Entman (2004) noted in this regard that "a dominant frame in the earliest news coverage of an event can activate and spread congruent thoughts and feelings in individuals' knowledge networks, building a new event schema that guides responses to all future reports. First impressions may be difficult to dislodge" (p.7).

In turn, Tewksbury et al. (2000) found that when a news message contains information novel to the audience, retention of associations between the issue and individuals' considerations becomes more rooted. Moreover, the authors claimed, the effect such news messages exerted on audience interpretations immediately after news exposure lasted up to three weeks. In turn, Chong and Druckman (2007a) stated that even individuals with strong predispositions/values were susceptible to framing effects arising from news messages on novel issues due to a lack of entrenched interpretations. Matthes (2010) also noted that mass media can strongly influence people's thinking when they are uncertain about their opinions on an issue. However, as he emphasized, "when people hold strong and established attitudes, exposure to counter frames in the mass media is unlikely to change their views" (p.8).

Another study conducted by Shen (2004) showed that novel constructs made applicable to a given issue are accepted by the audience, but that this happens even more readily if the audience members already possess certain schemas for the constructs.

Therefore, I hypothesize that when encountering information on a novel issue (say, country X secretly develops a nuclear weapon) but which is framed in a familiar way (say, in terms of a terrorist threat), audience members will rely on the frames that correspond to existing schemas in their minds, in order to come to preliminary conclusions about the issue. In addition, the information which is itself presented in a biased way – say, it is totally one-sided or contains solely allegations without any kind of proof – should resonate with the frames and strengthen them, thus exerting greater influence on information receivers than if it was reported in a more balanced manner. Obviously, definite individual characteristics should mitigate or even nullify that influence irrespective of the schema's strength, and I will discuss that, first, in brief later in this Part and, then, in more detail in subsequent parts of this Chapter. Now, to understand how framing affects individuals, it is essential to investigate how frames work from a cognitive and psychological perspective.

The essential foundations of framing effects: availability, accessibility, applicability.

In order for framing to take effect, a given consideration (say, free speech) highlighted in a message needs to be *available* and *accessible* in one's memory as well as *applicable* for the message interpretation. Availability refers to an individual's ability to understand what that consideration means (say, what 'free speech' implies) and, specifically, in terms of a given issue. It may be measured by asking individuals what considerations *at all* come to their minds when they think about the issue. Accessibility means that the consideration may be easily retrieved from long-term memory. Frequent – or recent – repetition of the consideration increases its accessibility, thus, making it possible to retrieve the idea automatically, that is, unconsciously. It can be measured by asking respondents what idea comes to their mind *first* when they think of the issue. Applicability implies the appropriateness of message frames to certain schemas an individual holds in his or her memory: the larger the resonance between the two, the larger impact the frame will have on the message processing, at least, before the stage of critical reasoning about the message. It may be measured by asking individuals to rate how effective a given frame is.

On different occasions, people can use different ways for evaluating a given frame. Sometimes, people base their judgments only on available and accessible constructs, without employing conscious information processing. However, when accessibility is not enough for

coming to a conclusion about an issue, individuals try to consciously evaluate the applicability of the accessible constructs. When this occurs, the greater strength a frame has (that is, in terms of higher availability and applicability), the more effective its influence on opinion will be. In addition, when comparing between frame repetition (aka accessibility) and strength (aka applicability), it transpires that the latter matters more than the former (Chong and Druckman, 2007b; Druckman, 2010). Considering whether frames work primarily through accessibility or applicability, other authors also indicated applicability. Thus, Nelson et al (1997b) concluded that frames are involved more in building associations between the constructs than in improving their accessibility. However, Tewksbury and Scheufele (2009) claimed that "the knowledge activation approach suggests that frequent exposure to a relatively consonant framing of an issue should strengthen the applicability link between an issue and a frame while increasing the long-term accessibility of that link" (p.30). Yet, it is reasonable to infer then, if some construct in an individual's head is both accessible and applicable, it will be more likely used when evaluating the issue.

Chong and Druckman (2007a) concisely described how frames are processed as follows:

> People draw their opinions from the set of available beliefs stored in memory. Only some beliefs become accessible at a given moment. Out of the set of accessible beliefs, only some are strong enough to be judged relevant or applicable to the subject at hand. Framing can work on all three levels, by making new beliefs available about an issue, making certain available beliefs accessible, or making beliefs applicable or 'strong' in people's evaluations". (p.111)

Given that to be applicable a belief regarding a given issue has to be accessible, first, and then activated, the question arises as to what can increase its accessibility in memory and activate it. Obviously, concept accessibility might be increased through frequent repetition of similarly framed messages about the issue in the media, whereas concept activation might be caused by two mechanisms: external stimulus (such as a strong frame) or the spread of activation from a related concept (e.g., Domke et al., 1998; Kinder, 1998; Roskos-Ewoldsen & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2009). In both cases, accessibility and activation, the process of *priming* comes into action.

Priming

Priming may be described as an effect of some preceding stimulus on subsequent evaluation of an issue, event or person. As Roskos-Ewoldsen and Roskos-Ewoldsen (2009) stated, this effect "is analogous to that which happens when a water well is primed. The act of priming the well enables the well to produce water when it is pumped afterward" (p.178). Its roots lie in cognitive and social psychology, which has been studying priming since the beginning of the 1970s to understand different aspects of how the cognitive system operates.

Specifically, to explain the underlying mechanisms of priming, the best thing is to look at network models of memory (Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997). The models presume that information is kept in the memory as a variety of specific nodes, where each node poses a distinct concept (for example, the concept of 'teacher' is represented by the 'teacher' node). Nodes that are 'conceptually close' to each other are linked by associative pathways (for example, 'teacher' is usually likely linked to 'school' and is unlikely to be linked with 'cement-mixer'; for some people, there might be a specific unusual linkage, though). Also, each node has its own activation threshold; when that is exceeded, the node immediately fires and activates other conceptually close nodes or, as it is said, spreads its activation. Thus, once activated, the related nodes need less activation afterwards to fire and, therefore, can be triggered easier. This additional activation might occur, again, as a result of spreading activation from conceptually close nodes or from an external factor, such as a word, syntagm or a phrase, image, etc.

With regard to media information, in particular, Entman (2004) defined priming as "activating an association between an item highlighted in the framed text and an audience's thinking about a related concept" (p. 27). In his view, the relation between framing and priming is that "frames introduce or raise the salience or apparent importance of certain ideas, activating schemas that encourage target audiences to think, feel, and decide in a particular way" (Entman, 2007, p. 164). That is, schemas, which can be described as clusters of linked ideas or feelings stored in memory, are connected in networks, and activation of one idea will cause activation of a related idea or ideas. For example, the frame 'terrorist' as a description of someone might develop associations with Osama bin Laden, the tragedy of the World Trade Center, and so forth, evoking negative feelings.

This raises the question of how to activate a certain association between a frame and a related concept or concepts? The answer is obvious, one might say: through frequently making the concept(s) *chronically accessible*. Chronic accessibility means that a concept or consideration is highly accessible from memory at any time. Increasing the chronic

accessibility of a concept is possible through repeated media exposure to that concept, that is, frequent repetition. If not reinforced, the concept gradually becomes less accessible and void with the course of time. However, if reinforced regularly, it becomes chronically accessible and comes to mind without effort when primed with specific frames that are associated with the concept(s) and which association has been established through being mentioned in repeated media messages. Given that primes exert stronger influence when the situations described are ambiguous or uncertain (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2007, 2009), as is the case with frames, and also that many thoughts and feelings arise without conscious effort and can be suppressed only afterward (e.g., Gilbert and Hixon, 1991), it can be inferred that priming and framing together might rule over and direct judgments under uncertainty, at least, in the early stages of processing the uncertain – or novel – information. Furthermore, the joint effect of two processes might be qualified as exercising a function of *soft persuasion,* by which I mean the power to implant convictions in individuals' minds indirectly, done not by the means of overt persuasion techniques but surreptitiously by prompting individuals to draw conclusions seemingly all alone. Needless to say, when inferences about an issue, object or event are not enforced from outside but made under one's own steam (even if such a belief is nothing more than an illusion), their significance for an individual becomes worth its weight in gold and gets the highest priority in making subsequent judgments on that issue, object or event. If this is the case, then it has succeeded - and the end of soft persuasion is gained.

Surely, the hypothesized influence is not yet another 'magic bullet'. Its effects are not universal and unconditional, and they differ for different individuals, depending on the specific characteristics inherent in them that moderate the degree of the influence.

Moderators of framing and priming

Moderators are variables that can modify the direction and/or strength of a relationship between independent or predictor variables and dependent or criterion variables (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Previous studies identified a number of moderators that condition framing and priming effects, and, for this reason, should be applicable also to the effects of manipulated information. Many scholars have pointed out at an important role that individual predispositions, and, specifically, values, toward an issue play in people's judgments (e.g. Druckman, 2001c; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). That is to say, those with stronger values are more resistant and, thus, less susceptible to influence from frames that are based on alternative values. At the same time, as Chong & Druckman (2007) stated, "even those with form values are susceptible to framing on new issues that have yet to

acquire a settled interpretation" (p.112).

Another important moderator is political knowledge; however, here the results of previous studies are conflicting to some extent. Some scholars found that framing and priming effects were stronger for individuals with less political knowledge (e.g., Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Domke et al., 1998; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). On the other hand, other researchers claimed they had the opposite findings (e.g., Krosnick and Brannon, 1993; Nelson et al., 1997b; Miller & Krosnick, 2000).

According to Goidel, Shields and Peffley (1997), evidence showed that people with more schematically organized knowledge about a certain topic were more capable of interpreting new information, storing it in their memory, and then retrieving it when necessary. Thus, Goidel et al. (1997) concluded that more knowledgeable citizens were able to cope with such tasks much better than those with lower levels of political knowledge. Valentino (1999) also pointed out that:

> …priming effects might be larger among the educated and politically aware because such citizens have richer associative networks in memory that facilitates storing and assessing new information. (p.314)

Thus, there is no unanimity among researchers as to whether framing and priming effects are stronger among more politically knowledgeable people or those who possess less political knowledge. Druckman (2002) suspected that such conflicting results were obtained because researchers confounded political knowledge *per se* with the "existence of prior opinions based on other information that vitiates the impact of a new frame" (p. 8). Thus, he claimed, there is a need for a control for the prior opinions. Chong and Druckman (2007) stated that knowledge facilitates framing effects "because it increases the likelihood that the considerations emphasized in a frame will be available or comprehensible to the individual" (p.112). However, when considering the effects of manipulated (roughly speaking, biased and framed) information, and specifically, about novel issues, I hypothesize that its influence should be weaker for citizens with higher levels of political competence due to their assumed ability to analyze information more carefully and think about it more critically while also understanding the role of frames. I will discuss this issue in more detail in Part 3 of this Chapter.

Scholars also emphasized the role of a credible source when exerting influence (e.g., Kuklinski & Hurley, 1993; Druckman, 2001c; Schaffner & Atkinson, 2010). Interestingly,

Kuklinski and Hurley (1993) noted that when citizens always regard messages as credible because they originate from a credible source, they can be easily misled by those messages. By the same token, Kucherenko and Christen (2014) found that the more a person trusted a particular news outlet, the more he or she trusted the article published in that outlet and considered the article unbiased. The inference made from the experimental findings stated that trust in the news outlet affected participants' perceptions of slanted articles "as trusted and unbiased, and acceptance of the standpoints they promoted" (Kucherenko & Christen, 2014, p.63).

2.1.3. Manipulated media information

Taking all the above into consideration and using it as the foundation for the concept of "manipulated media information", I will now explain what I mean by this term, which will be used throughout the rest of the thesis. I define manipulated information as one-sided presentation of information which is based on opinions instead of facts and as such contains allegations, causal interpretation(s) of the issue or problem described in the news reports/messages and assignment of responsibility for it. All of these together eventually might lead a consumer of such information to draw incorrect, erroneous conclusions about the issue or problem. In addition, manipulated media information might include emotionally loaded language and/or various framing and reasoning devices, strengthening the overall effects of such information on its consumers. As one can see from the definition, the proposed concept is inherently comprised of some of the most important, in my opinion, and characteristic features of both biased and framed media information. At the same time, it would be incorrect to refer to manipulated media information as only biased or only framed information. The reasons are that not always biased media information (say, one-sided) comprises features of negative framing (causal interpretation(s) of the issue or problem described in the news reports/messages and assignment of responsibility for it). By the same token, framed media information (moreover, framed in positive terms) by no means always contains elements of bias. Therefore, conceptually speaking, combining the essentials of biased information (in terms of one-sidedness and allegations) and negatively framed information (in terms of causal interpretation of an issue/problem and assignment of responsibility for it), manipulated media information provides ready templates for news consumers for making certain 'programmed' conclusions about the issue/problem described.

I will further clarify the essence of the building blocks.

One-sidedness here implies presenting only one viewpoint on an issue in a news report.

In addition, the presence of only one standpoint does not necessarily mean that it belongs to only one source – a person, organization or institution – that is cited in the report. Actually, more than one source might be mentioned or interviewed regarding the issue, but all the viewpoints will eventually and, of course, "accidentally" coincide. In other words, no alternative position on the issue is presented in the news report. It is in this particular sense that the notion of one-sidedness is used in my study.

(However, conceptually speaking, news information might be also regarded as one-sided in the case when an alternative point of view is mentioned in a news report just briefly, in a couple of sentences, or described in a critical or ironic tone. But since my thesis is not about the comprehensive substantiating of the notion of the "one-sidedness of news information" and uses it in the specified sense, I will leave all speculations about that for my future articles.)

Here it is necessary to point out one important characteristic of one-sided news information: the lack of any alternative point of view in a news report automatically makes the information unbalanced. (Of course, this should not refer to every type of news reports – say, weather reports or crime reports, which hardly need to have different viewpoints; it depends, though) Such information may therefore be quite easily detected. But what would be its alternative, one might ask? What makes information balanced? At this point, some clarification is needed. I regard it as a widespread fallacy when the notion of "objectivity of information" is confused with the notion of "balance of information". Objectivity is a kind of hardly achieved illusory ideal in presenting news information as it assumes presenting all the facts and the opinions of all parties (even third, fourth, and fifth ones) involved in an issue. To a certain extent, objectivity is an exhaustive, to the last detail, depiction of an issue. Perhaps, a very rough "objective view on an issue" may be achieved solely by a news consumer after a thorough exploration of a wide range of relevant viewpoints and perspectives, analyzing them and coming to a conclusion. But, even with that, there are always facts and opinions that remain hidden for one reason or another. Thus, when one maintains that objective news is just impossible, this statement makes sense. However, when it comes to balance in news, there is no necessity to mention every possible standpoint on an issue to make information balanced. Balance is a state of equilibrium or equipoise, and as such requires two alternative points of force to be exerted in order to counterbalance each other. In respect to news reports, the presence of two alternative standpoints ("yes – no", "pro – contra", "attacker – defender" etc.) expressed equivalently with regard to their size within the news report and language used for their description makes the story balanced but, at the same, not "objective". Argumentation

justifying both standpoints may not be unique, of course, in the sense that support for a certain policy, for example, might be dictated by different reasons for different people/organizations/institutions. Therefore, the reasons cited in the news report might not necessarily be those that a person who also supports the policy personally prefers or considers most important. Nevertheless, despite the lack of "objectivity" (in this case, not every reason for support has been taken into account in the news report), the overall position of support for the policy is present (let us assume, of course, that the position of rejection of the policy is in evidence as well, and equivalent in size and language to its alternative). That is to say, a news report is very unlikely to be objective, but it might easily be balanced.

Opinion-dominated or 'opinion laden' messages usually report not stark facts about events, issues etc., but contain interpretations of the events and issues. In turn, the opinions often fulfill the role of allegations, that is, statements without proof and references to the sources on which the opinions are based. A politically competent person ought to be able to recognize news information based on unfounded opinions. In the context of the concept of manipulated information, such opinion-dominated news messages also comprise unsubstantiated causal interpretations of the issue or problem described in the report and/or a precarious attribution of responsibility for it to someone or something.

Lastly, *loaded language* implies the use of positively or negatively connotated words and phrases and/or various rhetorical structures consisting of framing and reasoning devices.

In this way, manipulated news information might be regarded as a deceptive tool, enabling the misinforming or disinforming of citizens, especially with respect to novel or barely familiar information. The ability to recognize manipulative techniques and not to fall under such information influence, that is, not to believe what it proclaims, should depend greatly on to what extent a news consumer is able to critically assess media information. This component is in charge of analyzing, evaluating and drawing conclusions about news messages. Such a critically thinking individual is expected "to a greater degree [to] be immune to both unwitting and intentional attempts of news media to deceive or mislead with their news reports" (Kucherenko & Christen, 2014, p.56).

The aforementioned individual's ability to critically assess media information should depend, first and foremost, on the particular information-processing strategy that the news consumer employs. The next part of this Chapter will show that elaborative processing contributes considerably to such type of news evaluation. Moreover, the denoted strategy is hypothesized to be illustrative also of a person having a higher degree of political competence (this will be discussed in more detail in Part 3 of this Chapter).

Part 2. News information-processing strategies. The role of elaboration.

How people draw inferences from acquired news information depends on how they process it. That is to say, what news information-processing strategies they usually employing for getting the meaning (or even the various meanings) of media messages. Researchers in cognitive psychology and communication sciences have been studying these strategies for a long time. As a result, they have come to certain conclusions not only as to how we process information but also regarding how our individual traits, learned abilities and/or acquired characteristics are associated with particular types of reasoning or information-processing strategies.

Thus, as far back as the 17th century, the French mathematician, physicist and philosopher Blaise Pascal distinguished between intuitive and mathematical systems of human reasoning. Sigmund Freud propagated a distinction between irrational and rational thought processes that was embodied in the ideas of the unconscious and the conscious. Many contemporary psychologists also argue for two systems of reasoning – one of which allows for rapid intuitive conclusions to be made, and the other of which is targeted at drawing slower, elaborate inferences. In the literature, this partition of cognitive processes into two basic components – intuition and reasoning – comes under the label of *dual-processes models*. In general, there are three types of them: elaboration likelihood, heuristic/systematic, and two-systems models (Gilovich & Griffin, 2002).

Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model suggests that there are two 'routes' for persuasion or constructing attitudes: one is central and based on thoughtful consideration of information obtained, that is, on elaboration and analysis, while the other one is peripheral and employs various heuristic judgments (or simplifying techniques), based, for example, on attractiveness, likeability or group identification. Significantly, as O'Keefe (2009) pointed out, inferences drawn from central route processes are "likely to be more enduring… and to have greater influence on subsequent behavior than…[those] accomplished through peripheral-route process" (p. 277). Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly's (1989) heuristic/systematic model differs from the previous one predominantly in that it, firstly, assumes that heuristic processing makes use of learned rules in lieu of usual associations, and, secondly, it follows that intuitive and thoughtful processes occur in parallel, not sequentially, as the elaboration likelihood model states (Sloman, 2002).

Despite the aforementioned differences, both models reflect the 'cognitive miser' perspective when it comes to heuristic information processing (Gilovich & Griffin, 2002). The term 'cognitive misers' was coined by Fiske and Taylor (1991) to describe human beings as subjects with a limited information processing capacity. In other words, people are too lazy to engage in complex thinking and reasoning processes. As Fiske and Taylor (1991) emphasized, people search for "rapid adequate solutions, rather than slow accurate solutions" (p. 13). Or, as Hinton (2000) described it, "we rarely have the time or the inclination to ponder each new problem of our daily lives and so quick decisions without too much effort may have much pragmatic value to us" (p. 67). Thus, here heuristic processing takes the lead over systematic argumentative strategies that, in turn, are used, according to 'cognitive miser models', only when an individual has high motivation (involvement with the issue under consideration) as well as the cognitive capacity for information processing. While this approach seems convincing, it suffers from an oversimplification of human thinking processes, depicting humans as totally passive and lazy and who, with this condition, have not been capable of creating the world around us in all its variety or of effectively solving many tasks in our professional and daily lives.

The third type of dual-process model I mentioned earlier is the two-systems model, which differs from the cognitive miser perspective and has recently received much recognition from psychology and communication scholars. This model is used as a basis for this study. It postulates that two mental systems always function in parallel: "an associationist, parallel-processing system ('System 1') that renders quick, holistic judgments… and a more deliberate, serial and rule-based system ('System 2')" (Gilovich & Griffin, 2002, p. 16). System 1 is always running, and not just under conditions of low motivation, while System 2 supplements or overrides inferences drawn by the associationist one. Or, as Kahneman (2011) noted in respect to the two-systems model, "System 1 is gullible and biased to believe, System 2 is in charge of doubting and unbelieving" (p.81). Thus, System 1 provides so-called "natural assessments" based on general-purpose heuristics (such as affect, availability, causality, fluency, similarity), whereas System 2 ensures conscious selection and application of specific rules to monitor the quality of the assessments, which might be confirmed, corrected, or overridden. Therefore, the two-systems model does not conform to the cognitive miser perspective as it maintains a joint indivisible mechanism of information processing as distinct from the idea of two different 'routes' that function in an 'either-or' mode depending on the information processor's motivation (which influence is taken into account, of course, and varies "in the effort applied to the rule-based system" (Gilovich & Griffin, 2002, p. 16).

For clarity, Kahneman and Frederick (2002) summarized descriptions of the two systems in a table, which is presented below. Notwithstanding that the term 'two systems' might suggest something distinct and autonomous, the scholars noted that, this label represents a "collection of processes that are distinguished by their speed, controllability, and the contents on which they operate" (p.51) (Table 2):

Table 2. Two cognitive systems*

System 1 (Intuitive)	**System 2 (Reflective)**
Process Characteristics	
Automatic	Controlled
Effortless	Effortful
Associative	Deductive
Rapid, parallel	Slow, serial
Process opaque	Self-aware
Skilled action	Rule application
Content on Which Processes Act	
Affective	Neutral
Causal propensities	Statistics
Concrete, specific	Abstract
Prototypes	Sets

*Adapted from Kahneman and Frederick (2002).

Moreover, they emphasized that although System 1 is simpler than System 2, the latter is not necessarily more capable. The point is that, in the course of skill and competency improvement, the complex cognitive processing inherent in System 2 becomes habitual and straightforward and, as a result, becomes the quick and holistic operation intrinsic to System 1. To illustrate this, Kahneman and Frederick (2002) exemplified the process as follows:

> A striking demonstration of the intelligence of System 1 is the ability of chess masters to perceive the strength or weakness of chess positions instantly. For those experts, pattern matching has replaced effortful serial processing. (p. 51)

Thus, once rational inferences become intuitive over time (see also Hinton, 1990; Rumelhart, 1989). And these "accurate intuitions of experts", according to Kahneman (2011), are explained not by heuristics, but "by the effects of prolonged practice". In this way, intuitive answers proposed by System 1turn into ones that retain as an output a certain initial variant of judgment which is not modified much by System 2.

This applies both to situations when people rely on associative processes because they do not have the necessary knowledge about an issue under consideration as well as to practices when individuals already have and effortlessly employ that knowledge at an intuitive level. Regarding the first case, Evans (2004) noted that in situations where there is a lack of knowledge about an issue and people, considering only the "information in front of them", have to think logically, they quite often become susceptible to various judgment biases. Of course, no one is impervious to such biases. Even those, whose rational deliberate System 2 is more developed and their System 1 shoots quick and holistic intuitive judgments based on knowledge of issues and useful past experiences, they may be prone to biases due to, say, a stereotyping prevalence or liability for various cognitive illusions with regard to certain issues. However, such people will still be much less susceptible to fallacies of a similar nature or shallow judgments due to employing advanced elaborative information processing strategies. These, in turn, positively correlate with a higher level of intelligence (for examples, see Evans, 2004; Stanovich and West, 2002; Kahneman and Frederick, 2002; Stanovich, 1999) and, when it comes to media information processing, with knowledge of political and current events as well as with a component that might be qualified in this context as a critical assessment of media information (Eveland, 2005) – a relationship which is of great importance for this study.

In particular, Kosicki and McLeod (1990) pointed out three dimensions of information processing strategies: selective scanning, active processing, and reflective integration. Describing those, the researchers stated:

> Selective scanning is a reader or viewer's response to the volume of mediated information and the limited time and energy available for using media. Primarily the strategy involves tuning out items that are not of interest or use to the audience member.
> Active processing reflects the audience member's attempt to make sense of the story, going beyond the exact information given to interpret the

> information according to his or her needs. The strategy captures the person's need to "figure out" the story.
>
> Reflective integration represents the post-exposure salience of information such that it occupies the mind and is the subject of interpersonal discussion. The key, however, is the incorporation of new information into the person's existing cognitive framework for understanding the subject (Kosicki & McLeod, 1990, pp. 75-76).

Later, Eveland (2001, 2005) proposed that the concept of reflective integration be replaced with a concept of elaboration which, he stated, "in the context of processing news content is thus conceptualized as the cognitive use of news information to make connections to past experience and prior knowledge, and to derive implications from news content" (Eveland, 2005, p. 224). Among the reasons for such a replacement, he emphasized the necessity to separate two concepts of information processing and interpersonal discussion that are distinct because, otherwise, measuring the two together would lead to various types of error in measurement. Further, based on past research, Eveland (2005) demonstrated an existing relationship between information processing strategies and political and current events knowledge. The results are shown in the table below; in addition, the dimension of reflective integration as stated by Kosicki and McLeod (1990) is also included in the table (Table 3):

Table 3. Relationship between information-processing strategies and political/current events knowledge*

Information-processing strategies	Political and Current Events Knowledge
Reflective integration	Positive
Elaborative processing	Positive
Active processing	Positive
Selective scanning	Negative

*Adapted from Eveland (2005)

"Positive" indicates a tendency toward significant positive relationships across studies.

"Negative" indicates a tendency toward significant negative relationships across studies.

In addition, Eveland (2005) noted that knowledge and elaboration are reciprocally related; that is, greater prior knowledge inspires elaboration, and elaboration, in turn, increases and strengthens knowledge. And, for this reason, such a "reciprocal pattern of relationships may produce a spiral effect and thus contribute to knowledge gaps" (p. 234). Therefore, it can be inferred that greater political knowledge (which is a part of the "political expertise" construct in this study) should predict a more advanced elaborative processing capacity that, in turn, should be crucial when encountering and assessing manipulated media information.

Besides, significantly, Eveland (2005) developed and proposed a measurement of news information-processing strategies which contains specific indicators for revealing each of the three dimensions (the initial concept of reflective integration has been replaced by "elaborative processing"). These indicators (shown in Table 4 below) can be also perfectly utilized in the measurement of media literacy levels as to critical assessment of news media information, as had been already demonstrated, for instance, in the study by Guo and Moy (1998).

Table 4. Indicators for measurement of news information-processing strategies*

Dimension	Indicators
Elaborative Processing	· I often find myself thinking about things I've seen/read in the news. · I often tie what I see/read in the news to ideas I've heard before. · I often try to relate what I see/read in the news to my own personal experiences. I often think about how what I see/read in the news relates to other things I know. · Often when I've seen /read something in the news. I'll recall it later and think about it. · I often make connections between what I see/read in the news and things I've learned about elsewhere.
Active processing	· I often try to "read between the lines" of what I see/read in the news. · I often try to figure out the "real" story behind what I see/read in the news (seek additional information)
Selective scanning	· I often skim through the news to get the main points. · There is so much news out there that I pick out only the most important stories to focus on.

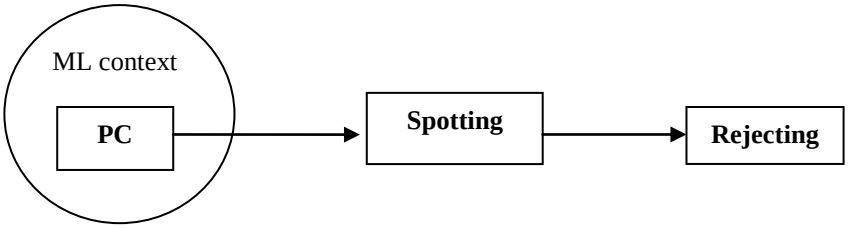
*Adapted from Eveland (2005)

As can be seen from the above, elaborative information processing, and, specifically, news information-processing, is a determining factor in people's perception and evaluation of media information. Manifesting itself in higher levels of political knowledge (and, as likely as not, political competence – see Part 3) and media literacy (as to critical assessment of media information - see Part 4), elaborative processing thus, and differently in each of the two instances, makes it possible to reveal manipulated news information and overrides its effects. Besides, within the two-systems model, it also implies the capability of drawing quick holistic inferences about an issue that are based on knowledge (for one, of political and current events, or how media generally try to influence their audiences, or to what purpose utilization of specific media frames is aimed at, etc.) which was frequently employed in the process of deliberation, and so, has become automatically activated. Finally, encountering uncertain information on a novel issue, individuals with a more developed elaborative component of thinking, as might be seen from Eveland's indicators, would rather not come to a certain conclusion about the issue altogether without getting some additional information on the topic, than unreservedly accept a standpoint expressed in the given media message or hastily judge its content altogether.

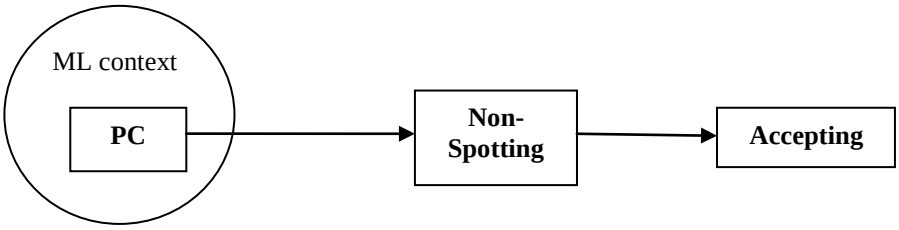
Thus, schematically, the model of an 'ideal relationship' between, on the one side, high and low levels of political competence and media literacy context in terms of critical assessment of media information (referring to as 'high elaborative information-processing strategy' and 'low elaborative information-processing strategy', respectively) and, on the other side, the perception and effects of manipulated media messages would be as follows:

Figure 1. Model of the Ideal Relationship between different levels of PC and ML context and perception of manipulated media information*

HIGH ELABORATIVE INFORMATION-PROCESSING STRATEGY



LOW ELABORATIVE INFORMATION-PROCESSING STRATEGY



*PC – political competence, ML context – media literacy context of a particular country, Rejecting [a standpoint expressed in a manipulated media message is rejected], Accepting [a standpoint expressed in a manipulated media message is accepted]; Spotting and Non-Spotting refer to the revealing and not revealing of manipulated information in a media message.

As one can see, taken in their purest form, assuming that no mediators exist, high levels of political competence as well as media literacy context in terms of critical assessment of media information would mean high levels of elaborative information-processing strategies employed by individuals and would inevitably lead to the spotting of and non-susceptibility to manipulated media information, whereas low levels would demonstrate an inverse effect, making an individual not capable of spotting that information and susceptible to its influence. However, when some mediating variables are introduced, the general pattern may likely be changed. For example, a more advanced media literacy context should likely be associated with lower levels of media trust, although, on the other hand, the same level of media trust might be illustrative of the individuals having a lower elaborative information-processing capacity. And the reason for that may lie not in the presence of critical thinking but be just due to that common nihilistic position "they are all always lying and trying to con me". Also, strong prior opinions – or predispositions – congruent with those expressed in a manipulated media message might make individuals with high elaborative information-processing

capacities believe that information they acquired is correct and unbiased, although, in reality, it is not. In turn, when it comes to novel issues, Chong and Druckman (2007a) reported thereverse finding that even individuals with strong predispositions/values were susceptible to framing effects that had arisen from news messages on novel issues due to a lack of entrenched interpretations within the individuals' interpretative schemes.

Significantly, although levels of political competence along with media literacy context may serve here in substance as proxies for levels of elaborative information-processing, they are not interchangeable factors and by no means duplicate each other when it comes to the revealing and evaluation of manipulated media messages on some novel foreign affairs issues. Their origins are also quite distinct. Thus, guided by conventional wisdom, one would suggest that individuals with high levels of political competence will also be highly media literate. However, the evaluation of a media message as manipulated may be not due to a 'political sophisticate's' high media literacy level but because this politically engaged individual is used to sorting through various controversial political cobwebs, finding the proper thread of an argument and raking out the correct information. In this way, the person is able to extrapolate his or her experience of reasoning in the complex and tricky world of politics into the realm of mass communication. Indeed, manipulation or, in other words, one-sidedness and the bias of media messages on a foreign affairs issue as well as the prevalence of opinion rather than facts in it will likely not differ fundamentally from what the person encountered when getting information about, say, his or her favorite candidate or political party from various sources and during political discussions. Consequently, the ability of revealing manipulated media information and being immune against its effects may result in this case from specific political knowledge as to which and how various strokes of policy are used for fighting political rivals and gaining supporters, that is to say, from 'political literacy', not media literacy.

On the other side, being a highly media literate person does not necessarily mean having at the same time a high political competence. The person might be knowledgeable in some fields other than politics (for example, pharmaceutics, philosophy, sports, engineering, etc.) but, at the same time, possess a high level of media literacy and, as a result, be able to reveal slanted, unbalanced information as such, irrespective of its type - whether it is political, economic, sports-related or whatever else, as the characteristics of manipulated information (one-sidedness and bias, predominance of evaluations and opinions instead of facts, presence of allegations) are always identical. Hence, my assumption is the following: a person who is able to reveal manipulated information in, say, medical media messages will also be entirely

able to reveal it in media messages on different topics – foreign affairs, in this case – through the same features inherent in the manipulated information, wherever it is used.

Therefore, higher levels of political competence and a media literacy context in terms of critical assessment of media information are regarded here as manifestations of elaborative information-processing strategies, although both have different natures: more narrow, ‘domain-oriented’ for the latter and broader, 'analogy-driven’ for the former.

Part 3. Political Competence

As early as 1954, Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee denoted the importance of making sense of the political world for the citizenry:

> The democratic citizen is expected to be well-informed about political affairs. He is supposed to know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences are. (1954, p.308)

The purpose of such 'political proficiency' is the ability to make informed political decisions and, most notably, by means of voting. Yet, in addition to the aforementioned, the possession of political knowledge, in the broadest sense of the word, offers some additional advantages. These include more developed political schemas in the memory, which lead to better political learning, retaining and extrapolating from any piece of complex information, as well as more advanced analytical processing strategies for evaluating news messages – features that are especially significant for this study.

Thus, Fiske et al. (1990) argued that higher levels of political sophistication are indicative of a higher degree of political schemas development. In turn, the developed political schemas add a great deal to political learning. Moreover, individuals with more developed political schemas consider persuasive messages more carefully and, as a result, are able to infer more accurate conclusions from political communications (Hsu & Price, 1993; Nelson et al., 1997; Rhee & Cappella, 1997). In this regard, Nelson et al. (1997) stated that individuals with higher levels of political sophistication are more resistant to persuasive messages for the reason that they already know the arguments used in the messages and, thus, are capable of analyzing and rejecting them more easily, especially if the arguments prove to be counterattitudinal. A number of other researchers (e.g., Krosnick and Brannon, 1993; Goidel et al., 1997) also pointed out that people with more schematically organized political knowledge are better at interpreting new information, storing it in the memory and easily retrieving it later.

In addition to possessing more developed schemas, political sophisticates – or political experts – process news more deeply in comparison to less sophisticated individuals, and they employ more analytic processing strategies in evaluating messages than do political

novices (e.g., Fiske et. al., 1990; Judd and Downing, 1990; Krosnick, 1990; Hsu & Price, 1993; Rhee & Cappella, 1997; Guo & Moy, 1998). According to Kinder (1990), political experts, are more capable of identifying the important parts of information, encoding it in a more abstract way, and employing deeper analytic techniques for its processing. In turn, Hsu and Price (1993) concluded that political expertise is a "significant predictor of the extent of subjects' analytic processing" (p.687). In characterizing the analytical information processing of political experts, the researchers particularly emphasized:

> Analytical thinking… involves the generation of cognitive responses to a news message and, especially, the generation of issue-relevant responses. Analytical thinking further involves consideration of both schema-consistent and schema-inconsistent information and, consequently, the use of reasoned arguments rather than mere evaluations. Experts process messages carefully and ruminate over the positions or views presented in the messages, whereas novices are less inclined to do so. (p.677)

This description perfectly corresponds to what Eveland (2005) referred to as elaborative information-processing strategies that are positively associated – and, moreover, reciprocally related – with high levels of political/current affairs knowledge (see Chapter II). In the same way, active processing of political information is also positively related to political/current affairs knowledge (Eveland, 2005; Guo and Moy, 1993) and, in fact, should be regarded – and will be in this study – as an integral part of elaborative thinking. For that matter, Guo and Moy (1993) described active processing of information as follows:

> It is characterized by mental efforts to go beyond the information presented and the context in which information is presented to attain a more complete understanding and interpretation of the political figures, issues, and events. Here, the interaction between existing political schema and incoming political information weighs more heavily. In essence, active processing of information develops as a strategy to cope with often incomplete and vague information… Rather than simplify filling in missing information with prior knowledge and opinion, active processors make greater efforts to seek truth through mental rehearsals of new information and cross-validation from multiple sources. (p.28)

Hence, political experts – or, in other words, more politically knowledgeable, politically sophisticated individuals – become not only 'better citizenry' in the sense of active political participation and informed voting but also as deeper and more accurate information processors. Moreover, the latter characteristic should presumably concern not only specific political information regarded as 'domestic' – as to political candidates/parties, election, voting, etc. – but also information in a broad manner, and news information in particular, even if it refers to some more distant and unknown issues such as, for instance, foreign affairs. Put differently, the highly developed elaborative and active information processing component of political experts should function identically (say, in a certain 'schematic' way) irrespective of the type of information encountered, as its evaluation would take its course according to the same mechanisms and reference points underlying the process of elaborative thinking (these may be considered through the lens of Eveland's specific indicators presented in Part 2 of this Chapter). Finally, political knowledge also carries significant weight as a compound of general intelligence. According to Luskin (1990), "the dependence on intelligence should be greater for political than for many other sorts of knowledge, because politics is more abstract and remote – simply 'harder material' – than, say, sports or cooking" (p.336). Therefore, the certain level of political competence (known also as political expertise, political sophistication, political knowledge, political involvement) an individual possesses can be indicative of his/her general cognitive capacities including information processing strategies and, thus, measured in a certain way so as educe the aforementioned attributes.

The concept of political competence is well known under various terminological aliases such as political expertise, political sophistication, political knowledge, political awareness, political involvement, and political literacy, to name a few. These terms appear to have the same or very similar meaning regardless of the academic discipline within which they are used. The remarkable fact is that all of them stress the importance of the cognitive aspect of the concept.

Thus, Zaller's (1992) 'political awareness' refers to "the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics and understands what he or she encountered… Political awareness denotes intellectual or cognitive engagement with public affairs as against emotional or affective engagement or no engagement at all" (p. 21). Political knowledge also presumes a person's cognitive ability to process information and distinguish correct information from incorrect (Sartori, 1987, p.117). In this way, knowledge differs from political information which is "a relatively narrow and straightforward construct relating to

factual knowledge in the political domain" (Price, 1999). In turn, Converse (1964) emphasized the cognitive property of political sophistication "where the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence" (p. 207). Luskin (1987, 1990) also promoted the concept of political sophistication which is "a matter of cognition" and includes "the number, diversity, and organization (both internal and interschema) of a person's political schemata" (p.860). In addition, the number, diversity, and organization of information (or, in Luskin's terms, size, range, and diversity, respectively) are positively related. "Political sophistication is cognitive complexity about politics", Luskin (1992) concludes, "Another name for this same variable, in the information processing literature, is expertise. Expertise is extensive, organized knowledge. Political sophistication is political expertise" (p.861).

To measure these concepts, various researchers have used different indicators. However, setting apart demographics, the central determinants of the aforementioned concepts were cognate enough. In particular, Krosnick (1990), McGraw and Pinney (1990), and Zaller (1992) included in their measure of political sophistication such components as factual political knowledge, media use, political interest, and political behavior. Fiske et al. (1983, 1990) composed the construct of the political expertise of the interlocking set of factual political knowledge, media use, political interest, and political activity. A number of researchers (e.g. Judd & Downing, 1990; Price & Zaller, 1993; Delli Karpini & Keeter, 1996) combined political factual knowledge and political involvement into a single scale. Luskin (1990) looked at political factual knowledge, political interest, and media exposure. Guo and Moy (1993) included in their measure such constituents as media use, political interest, political factual knowledge, and active processing of information.

Consequently, based on previous research and the empirical confirmation of relationships between various components of the central concept derived from them, political competence is defined for this study as *the amount of political knowledge and experience sufficient to process political information, as well as other complex information. As a result of such processing, comes a decision whether the information received might be trusted at face value or should be verified first before coming to a certain conclusion on it.* With that, the concept of political competence comprises five components: political interest, media use for getting political information, factual political knowledge, political discussion, and political participation/activity.

Political interest poses an internal motivating force and in this study refers to the extent to which a person follows politics or how much he or she is interested in politics, in

general. Here, no specification is made about any particular political campaign or different levels of politics (say, international, national, local) but these have all been incorporated into one measure. Those interested more often seek out political information and are, therefore, more frequently exposed to news and likely pay more attention to it as well as participate in various political activities and political discussions. Even if the last two compounds (participation and discussion) are absent for some reason (often because of some personality traits such as, for example, introvertedness), due to their greater political interest, such persons should still be more politically knowledgeable (meaning here factual knowledge) thanks to the news and feasibility of online participation and discussions, and have more developed political schemas that, in turn, facilitate more deep and accurate political judgments. All that should, among other things, contribute to higher scores on a political competence scale.

Media use refers here to the frequency of intentional political information consumption from the news media, in general, and the frequency of seeking in the news media additional information on political topics of interest, as well as the types of media most often used (newspapers, TV, various Internet news sources) and the types of news content that are usually preferred (that is, hard news vs. soft news). Intentionality and additional information seeking indicate not only a person's real interest in politics, but also the elaborative information-processing he or she possesses. The type of media most often used points to persons preferring to get their news from Internet and, thus, being in contact with the varied particularities of online news sources. Lastly, the type of political news content a person favors may be indicative of his or her propensity to and need for more serious, analytic media materials and, in this way, of his or her higher intellectual abilities.

Factual political knowledge is "the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long-term memory", as Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996, p.10) defined it. Here 'facts' refer to objectively verifiable political cognitions – say, the name of the person who holds the office of prime-minister, or whether a given country has signed the Kyoto Protocol, or what political party dominates the country's parliament, etc. In this way, facts differ from a person's political evaluations or beliefs, which are subjective. 'Range' pertains to a variety of cognitions related to the realm of politics – what a country's political institutions are, how they function, who the main political actors are, etc. Finally, when speaking of long-term memory where the factual information is stored, this refers primarily to retaining information over time and its availability for future use. Interestingly in this regard, a good many researchers found that the amount of factual political knowledge was the best indicator of

political competence and its related concepts of 'political expertise', ‘political sophistication’, ‘political awareness’, ‘political literacy’, etc. (e.g., Luskin, 1987, 1990; Fiske et al., 1990; McGraw & Pinney, 1990; Price & Zaller, 1990; Zaller, 1990, 1992; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993; Price, 1999).

However, it would be fallacious to rely on this indicator as a single predictor of those concepts, for factual political knowledge can, first and foremost, be regarded as a matter of memory, the effectiveness of which is often subject to circumstances (say, in terms of research, artificiality of study setting, questionnaire design, or even a personal reason of a participant – bad mood, fatigue, etc.). Consequently, it would hardly be possible - or reliable - to predict on the basis of only factual political knowledge how active an individual is, say, in political discussions, developing the competency to argue in favor of her/his political standpoints and the counterargumentsof a political opponent as well as to sort through the controversies, inconsistencies and persuasive efforts of the political talking points. It would also be difficult to know, on the assumption of only factual political knowledge, how often an individual intentionally consumes political information from various media. Or, to what extent he or she is a politically active citizen, that is, how often he or she deliberately participates in various forms of political life. Meanwhile, both aforementioned components also add significantly to the general characteristic of individual political competence. And, finally, the experimentally explored effects of individuals' levels of factual political knowledge on spotting manipulated media information were quite small, and, at the same time, no association at all was found between factual political knowledge and susceptibility to manipulation in news reports (Kucherenko & Christen, 2014). All this might denote that factual political knowledge alone is not the best indicator of one's entire political competence, at least when it comes to the influence of the latter on the perception of media information, and, specifically, manipulated media information.

For this reason, the concept of political competence incorporates several indicators that complement and cross-validate each other as, it must be said, the forenamed researchers did as well. Also, it is important in this regard that when measuring political knowledge this study distinguishes between *structural knowledge*, referring to what is relatively stable and permanent in politics (say, questions about the tasks of parliament, what is proportional representation, etc.), and *political information*, which refers to something situational and transient (say, questions about the name of the prime-minister, the parties holding the majority in the parliament, etc.). In this way, such a measurement allows us to tap into the real political knowledge persons have, and not only the attention they pay to current affairs. Besides, to

ensure a true comparison between the three European countries included in the research (the Netherlands, Austria, and Italy) on the political knowledge/competence dimension, this study employs questions used in the European Election Study 2009 which are long term (not tied to a timeframe), standardized across countries, have different degrees of difficulty, and allow for a cross-country comparison (more details follow in Chapter III on methods).

Political discussion implies deliberation of political issues with other people. Its role in promoting political knowledge and, consequently, political expertise is quite considerable. Robinson and Levy (1986) revealed a significant relationship between the two – a finding that has been confirmed in many other studies (e.g., Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Bennet et al., 2000; Scheufele, 2000, 2002; Eveland, 2004; Eveland & Thomson, 2006). In particular, Gastil & Dillard (1999) concluded that participating in face-to-face discussion "often introduces conflicting points of view, highlights moral and practical trade-offs, and *stimulates critical thinking*" (p.4; emphasis added). In turn, in line with this conclusion, Eveland & Hively (2009) inferred that "discussing politics more often may produce more facts and more structuring of political concepts in comparison with those who discuss politics less often" (p.218). Although some researchers have suggested using different categories for distinguishing the intensity of political discussion (such as whether someone participates in the discussion passively by listening, rarely gives an opinion, often gives an opinion, or tries to convince others of his or her positions), this study does not set as its mission to explore how different types of discussion influence something. Rather, in order to infer a higher level of political competence and elaborative information processing, what is meant here is the active deliberation of political topics as well as attempts to persuade a discussant opponent(s) of one's political views (including reasons to vote for or against a candidate or a political party). Here it is of no importance if such discussions are face-to-face or online.

The classical definition of *political participation* holds that it "refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take" (Verba & Nie, 1972, p.2). Later specifications of the term closely resemble the classic one (Brady, 1999), but more importantly, all four main elements required for political participation are included – citizens, actions, influence, and political outcomes. As Brady (1999) concisely formulated, "political participation, then, requires *action* by *ordinary citizens* directed toward *influencing* some *political outcomes*" (p.737, emphasis in original). The general typology of political participation proposed by Verba and Nie (1972) survives to this day and consists of four parts: 1) voting in elections (national, local); 2) campaign activity (including attending a political

rally, working in a campaign on behalf of a candidate, contributing money, etc.); 3) citizen contacts (e.g., contacting government officials, signing petitions); and 4) cooperative participation (for instance, joining a political group or organization). This study employs indicators of political participation within the given framework: voting in elections of different levels; attending political rallies; contacting officials or politicians; campaigning for candidates or political parties; membership of a political organization; and participating in political protests. Such elements as 'contributing money' have been excluded as not all countries included in the study warrant such activity by law.

Numerous studies found a strong relationship between education and political competence and its many aliases (e.g., Verba & Nie, 1972; Luskin, 1990; Zaller, 1990; Price & Zaller, 1993; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Cassel & Lo, 1997; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Grönlund & Milner, 2006). In particular, Eveland and Scheufele (2000) noted:

> Those who attained a higher level of formal education have had more training and practice in learning and integrating information, not to mention more experience taking tests. They are likely to have better reading ability and be better at selecting and storing key points of information from a given news story. They are also more likely to engage in elaborative processing of mediated information, which is a key determinant of learning identified by psychologists and educational researchers. (p.217)

Notwithstanding that some researchers argue that "education's" effects are often confounded with those of intelligence, occupation, and interest (e.g., Luskin, 1990), others insist that education still matters. Whatever the case, I concede that education should be a significant determinant of political competence when a researcher compares an educated vs. an uneducated population, specifically when it comes to representative samples. But when convenience samples are used, especially those consisting of college/university students, the education variable is of little use – the difference between, say, sophomores and juniors in levels of political competence will hardly be great enough to draw an inference about the significance of one additional year of education.

Furthermore, for the same reason, if the student population is separated from the low-educated 'never-been-a-student' one, we will likely see the same picture if we compare the two different populations - that political competence is still not distributed homogenously

across the chosen population. To prove this, it is sufficient to include questions measuring political knowledge in order of increasing degree of difficulty, as was done in this study. Such an approach allows us to distinguish between those who are really interested in politics and others who have learnt some basic political ideas at high school or college (which the low-educated have not done and so they cannot always answer survey questions) but have no further interest in political information. Finally, employing a student population in this study to reveal the role of political expertise (and media literacy context) in the perception of manipulated media information is not a limitation but a distinct advantage. Bearing in mind that, students usually possess better cognitive skills, have higher political knowledge, and enjoy more advanced information processing abilities compared to the general public, we should be fortunate to access this 'target population' which is young, intelligent, knowledgeable, and flexibly-minded, to test its ability to withstand the influence of manipulated media information. Indeed, if they prove to be susceptible, thus not able to reveal bias, one-sidedness, and allegations in a media message and, moreover, they accept the message's standpoint(s), what could one theoretically infer, then, about populations that are low-educated, less intelligent, ignorant, and close-minded? In other words, if political competence as a possible predictor fails when it comes to, the let us call it, advanced part of the general public, the odds are that we can discard it as an explanatory variable with regard to the entire population, in this way, 'generalizing' our results (we may also consequently want to try to modify our measurement of the concept, if it makes sense). However, to ensure variation, participants for this study were recruited from different departments, assuming rightfully that, for example, those studying political science should score higher on political competence than those studying, say, music.

Therefore, higher scores on the five indicators described above will indicate a higher level of political competence, meaning the possession of a larger store of "factual and associational political knowledge that facilitates the manipulation of political information stored in long-term memory and information encountered in the immediate environment" (Goren, 2000). In the same vein, it will also mean a higher level of elaborative information processing ability, that is, the ability to think critically, to mentally connect distinct and often disjointed pieces of information, and determine the relevance of the information presented, in this context, in a media message to the overall conclusions to be inferred from it.

Part 4. Media Literacy: Skills and Context

2.4.1. Media literacy in democratic societies: its functions and importance

The importance of media literacy in the modern world of increasingly growing information flows and developing media technologies is universally acknowledged. Being media literate encourages and empowers to individuals by strengthening their "access, analytic ability and communication skills for monitoring one's community and the world at a personal, social, cultural and global level" (Babad, Peer & Hobbs, 2009, p.3). Aufderhide (1993) claimed that "the fundamental objective of media literacy is critical autonomy in relationship to all media" (p. 9). Media literate persons can appreciate that the media are constructed and construct reality; that they are commercial enterprises; that the media may be ideologically and politically biased; that each medium has a unique content, aesthetic, codes, and conventions; that information receivers negotiate the meaning of media messages according to their own personal experiences. Hobbs (1996) also noted that media literacy should promote autonomy. Brown (1998) wrote that media literacy is intended to help media information consumers "become active, free participants in the process rather than static, passive, and subservient to the images and values communicated in a one-way flow from media sources" (p. 47).

Some scholars have emphasized that the main goal underlying media literacy is not to help people becoming better information consumers but better citizens and, in this way, topromote social change (e.g., Dyson, 1998; Lewis and Jhally, 1998; Masterman, 1997). Thus, Masterman (1997) related the level of the development of participatory democracy with the level of control citizens have over state institutions and level of their cooperation with media. Mihailidis and Thenvenin also emphasized the need for citizens to "act as critical thinkers" in the sense of their ability "to critically access and analyze a constant and diverse stream of information on which to base their democratic participation" (p. 4). In particular, the authors noted, media literate citizens will be not only able to analyze mediated representations of their communities and address issues within them, but also be involved in "deconstructing injustices, expressing their own voices, and struggling to create a better society" (Kellner & Share, 2007, pp. 19-20).

In turn, the European Commission's approach to media literacy lies in the fact that it is an important factor for active citizenship in the modern information society. Specifically, in

2007, the EC specified the aim of media literacy as follows:

> The aim of media literacy is to increase awareness of the many forms of media messages encountered in our everyday lives. It should help citizens recognize how the media filter their perceptions and beliefs, shape popular culture and influence personal choices. It should empower them with critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills to make them judicious consumers and producers of information. Media education is part of the basic entitlement of every citizen, in every country in the world, to freedom of expression and the right to information and it is instrumental in building and sustaining democracy. (Cited in the "Study on assessment criteria for media literacy levels", 2009, p. 23)

On the other hand, the 'protectionist' view of media literacy sticks to the idea that individuals must be able, first of all, understand and resist various media effects. Thus, speculating about media education, Masterman (1985) pointed out that one of its purposes lies in helping people understand the ways in which the media distort reality through their messages and, subsequently, how our knowledge of the world is shaped by the media representations. Later, Ashley et al (2010) succinctly and aptly emphasized the gist of this point:

> As Marshal McLuhan famously pointed out, humans live in constructed media environments as unconsciously as fish in water. Therefore, it can be difficult to see that media constructions of reality sometimes offer incomplete or inaccurate portrayals of the world we live in. The growing field of media literacy aims to make media consumers aware of their media environments and increase critical thinking about media's constructions of reality. (Ashley et al, 2010, p. 37)

Kellner and Share (2007) noted that all messages are influenced by the subjectivity and biases of their creators and the various contexts in which the messages are communicated. For this reason, media literacy, or, as they call it, critical media literacy, questions the 'objective' nature of such messages. According to Hobbs and Frost (2003), the focus of media literacy is on representations of reality as reflected in various media messages, which are often

inaccurate or incomplete. In turn, Buckingham (2003), arguing also that media do not present but re-present reality in a specific and biased, non-objective way, also called on the consumers of media messages to critically examine them from the following points of view:

Realism:	Is the text intended to be realistic? Why do some texts seem more realistic than others?
Telling the truth:	How do media claim to tell the truth about the world?
Presence and absence:	What is included and excluded from the media messages? Who speaks, and who is silenced?
Bias and objectivity:	Do media texts support particular views about the world? Do they put across moral or political values?
Stereotyping:	How media represent particular social groups? Are those representations accurate?
Interpretations:	Why do audiences accept some media representations as true, or reject others as false?
Influences:	Do media representations affect our views of particular social groups or issues?

(Buckingham, 2003, p.58)

In effect, the importance of developing and cultivating such a component of media literacy as critical thinking (also known as critical evaluating, critical understanding, critical analyzing etc.) has been emphasized by many scholars in the field (e.g., Aufderhide, 1993; Denski, 1994; Sholle, 1994; Hobbs, 1996; Silverblatt & Eliceiri, 1997; Lewis & Jhally, 1998; Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Buckingham 2003, 2006; Kellner & Share, 2007, 2010; Silverblatt, 2008; Ashley et al., 2010; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013). In particular, Hobbs (1996) mentioned the following component necessary for being media literate: "the process of critically analyzing and learning to create one's own messages in print, audio, video, and multimedia" (p. 16). Silverblatt and Eliceiri (1997) stated that media literacy implies "a critical-thinking skill that enables audiences to decipher the information that they receive through the channels of mass communications and empowers them to develop independent judgments about media content" (p.48). Rafferty (1999) viewed the role of media literacy as making people critical consumers of ideas and information, which means they should be able to interpret media messages by creating personal meanings from codes and conventions as well as thinking critically about them. In 2008, Silverblatt pointed out

that: “Media literacy is, first and foremost, a critical thinking skill that is applied to the source of most of the information we receive: the channels of mass communications” (p.4). Discussing the goal of media literacy, Ashley et al (2010) noted that it is not about simply generating distrust, cynicism or apathy: “The goal is to teach critical thinking skills that will help citizens evaluate media content and make judgments based on a more complete understanding of how the news is produced. A media literate citizenry is better equipped to demand and appreciate quality journalism that truly adheres to the norms to which it aspires” (p. 43). Hobbs and Frost (2003) indicated that skills of critical thinking should always be applied to print and non-print texts. Under the aforementioned skills, Hobbs and Frost (2003) suggested (1) identifying message design and construction techniques; (2) recognizing how authors express specific values and points of view; (3) comparing and contrasting messages with similar content; (4) noticing when information is omitted from a message; and (5) identifying an author's purpose and target audience.

Thus, critical thinking is one of the central ideas and crucial skills of media literacy, along with analysis and evaluation, and conscious processing (Craft et al., 2013). Earlier, Potter (2004, 2011) listed the most relevant skills for media literacy as skills of analysis, evaluation, grouping, induction, deduction, synthesis, and abstraction. Table 5 briefly specifies what task each of the seven skills serves for.

Table 5. The most important skills of media literacy*

Skill	***Task***
Analysis	Breaking down a message into meaningful elements
Evaluation	Judging the value of an element; the judgment is made by comparing the element to some criterion
Grouping	Determining which elements are alike in some way; determining which elements are different in some way
Induction	Inferring a pattern across a small set of elements, then generalizing the pattern to all elements in the set
Deduction	Using general principles to explain particulars
Synthesis	Assembling elements into a new structure
Abstracting	Creating a brief, clear, and accurate description capturing the essence of a message in a smaller number of words than the message itself

*Adapted from Potter (2004, p. 124)

Therefore, by means of these skills, people build and develop their knowledge structures, consequently increasing their media literacy, specifically as it pertains to critical thinking around the news messages. Potter (2011) emphasized in this regard:

> Skill development is what really can make a large difference in a person moving from low to high media literacy. People who have weak skills will not be able to do much with the information they encounter. They will ignore good information and fixate on inaccurate or bad information. They will organize information poorly, thus creating weak and faulty knowledge structures. In the worst case, people with weak skills will try to avoid thinking about information altogether and become passive; the active information providers – such as advertisers and entertainers – will become the constructors of people's knowledge structures and will take control over of how people see the world. (p. 42)

And whilst the importance of the aforementioned skills holds for diverse forms and types of media information, it is specifically true when it comes to news messages. News media literacy has even become a special line of research in the broader field of media literacy (Mihailidis, 2001, 2012). As Craft et al. (2013) put it:

> What sets news apart from media generally and makes it worthy of a separate investigation - and an even higher level of scrutiny - is the unique role of news in democracy. News, unlike other media content, is expected to do the job of informing self-governing citizens (Christians et al., 2009), a role that faces mounting challenges as traditional news outlets shrink and disappear, and emerging digital products demonstrate both the promise and the perils of information online. (p. 4)

For this reason, to be able to make informed decisions on the basis of various political, economic, and social news and to fully participate in democratic society, citizens should understand what influences news reliability and credibility and be able to distinguish reliable and credible information from questionable and uncertain information (Craft et al., 2013). In turn, the successful development of this ability, which is crucial for every democratic society's

citizenry, should indispensably be related to and depend on the media literacy context existent in that society or country.

2.4.2. Description of the concept of media literacy context as is used in the thesis. Previous studies in which the concept was established and confirmed

Media literacy context as is used in this research was based on the results of two studies: the 'Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels in the Member States of the European Union' (2009) and the 'Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe' (2011). The purpose of the first study was set to provide an understanding of what implies to have a media literate citizens, and to identify what level of media literacy each of the Member states possesses. The second study was intended to test and refine the criteria needed for assessment media literacy levels in EU-27.

2.4.2.1. The Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels in the Member States of the European Union

The study was conducted from October 2008 to July 2009 by the Consortium of research institutions in cooperation with many national and international organizations, including the European Newspaper Publishers' Association, a good many of the European Media Desks, and numerous experts all over Europe.

After the analysis of the collected data, which was conducted so to make comparison possible and escape influence of national variations, two main dimensions have been identified within media literacy: Individual Competencies and Environmental Factors. *Individual Competencies* might be defined as "a personal, individual ability to exercise certain skills (access, use, analyse, understand and create). These skills are found within a broader set of abilities that allow for increasing levels of awareness, the capacity for critical analysis, a creative, problem-solving capacity and the ability to create and communicate content *inter alia* participating to public life" (the Study, 2009, Annex B, p. 4). *Environmental Factors* might be defined as "a set of contextual factors (affecting Individual Competencies) that impact the broad span of media literacy, including informational availability, media policy, education and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the media community" (the Study, 2009, p. 7). Table 6 below summarizes the mentioned dimensions and their criteria.

Table 6. Media literacy dimensions and their criteria*

DIMENSIONS	COMPONENTS / CRITERIA
Individual competencies	• Use - *Technical skills; required for the effective use of media tools* • Critical Understanding - *Cognitive skills; capacities related to knowledge and semiotic operations: encoding/decoding, interpreting, evaluating media text* • Communicative abilities - *Communicative and participative skills; capacities to interact with others through media and maintain networks*
Environmental Factors	MEDIA AVAILABILITY Supply of media
	MEDIA LITERACY CONTEXT • Media Education as a process to develop media literacy capacities • Media literacy policies and regulatory authorities • Media industry role and activity in relation to media literacy • Civil society role and activity in relation to media literacy

*Adapted from the Study (2009)

Importantly, the Study (2009) stated that "Environmental Factors contextualize the facilitation of media literacy development, and therefore include those factors that engender or endanger individual skills" (p. 45). Describing the overall role of Environmental Factors, the Study (2009) posited:

> "If the factors are favorable, and media literacy has an important and considered position in national policy, it follows that media literacy levels will be high. This relationship can be demonstrated statistically, and does not exclude the possibility the possibility that, in environments largely hostile or neutral to the development of media literacy, or without the economic capacity to foster access, exceptional cases of individual development may be isolated. However, these are likely to be an exception, and not the form" (p. 48).

Significantly, the Study (2009) referred to the Critical Understanding component as "the most important aspect of the relationship between the individual and the media" (p. 38) and

emphasized its development (along with citizen participation) as "the ultimate focus (and ambition) of media literacy" (p. 9) . As it was put in the Study (2009):

> "The user's ability to process information in fundamental to understanding media messages and texts, without which they cannot find meaning in it. Critical Understanding competence allows the user to capture, assimilate and produce information. It includes also the use of information to obtain an appropriate understanding of the environment and to use the information solve problems, to create and produce meaning, etc." (p. 38)

In addition, within Critical Understanding competence, the Study (2009) made an emphasis on the individuals' ability to distinguish between information and opinion which "is fundamental to allow further understanding of the elements, and also to formulate an appropriate response to it" (p. 38). Furthermore, the ability to evaluate the media content was regarded as "key part of media literacy" (Annex B, p. 9), inasmuch as even "as a simple consumer of goods and services, the citizen has to be capable of, amongst others, evaluating the value of the messages and, consequently, making informed choices, being able to evaluate the offers, to orientate him/herself within all the options and to distinguish among the various forms of persuasive discourse (advertising, publicity, commercial promoting, including communication strategies in all spheres: political, economical… etc)" (the Study, 2009, Annex B, p. 10). In other words, the media consumer has to be able to evaluate a media message from such positions as whether it can be trusted; or whether the content is legal; or whether it is outdated or up to date; or whether it is the quality reporting in terms of sources, details, balance, etc.

However, the Study (2009) pointed, it is quite ironical that in the countries with the wealth of the media available the citizens cannot always make the informed use of them. Furthermore, the high necessity for having Critical Understanding competencies, and specifically with regard to understanding and evaluating media content, got a global pan-European tone:

> "…while Europe's populace may be said to exist within a media (rather than an information) society, the power of the media has been largely underestimated in the past and it constitutes an increasing concern for many national and international institutions. As such, it is clear that the principles

of democracy that informed the creation of the European Union are under threat – not from violent attack, but from apathy and passive disengagement. This worrying development can be explained in part by the inability of media users (or, in the alternative, "everybody") to utilize the information flow to their (and their society's) benefit. Media literacy can counter-balance these dangerous effects through inclusiveness – but it is well to remember that "civil" society is often inaudible contextually, and **Europe's citizens need to be better equipped to understand the media flow and to reveal why a message has been deliberately transmitted in a false or misleading way.** The media is the primary (if not the only) vehicle for the diffusion of political and economic self-interest, **and the more media literate a society becomes, the less likely it is that individuals and groups will subscribe to (or be seduced by) the specious and the fallacious**" (the Study, 2009, p. 9; emphasis is mine).

Thus, after the specific weighting had been applied to each component of media literacy dimensions, all the data analyzed were divided into three levels, taking for a check-point the EU average (score of 100). Such an approach made it possible to compare between the levels of media literacy of the Member States of the European Union. The mentioned three levels of media literacy competences, including both Environmental Factors and Individual Competencies, were described in the Study (2009) as shown in Table 7 below:

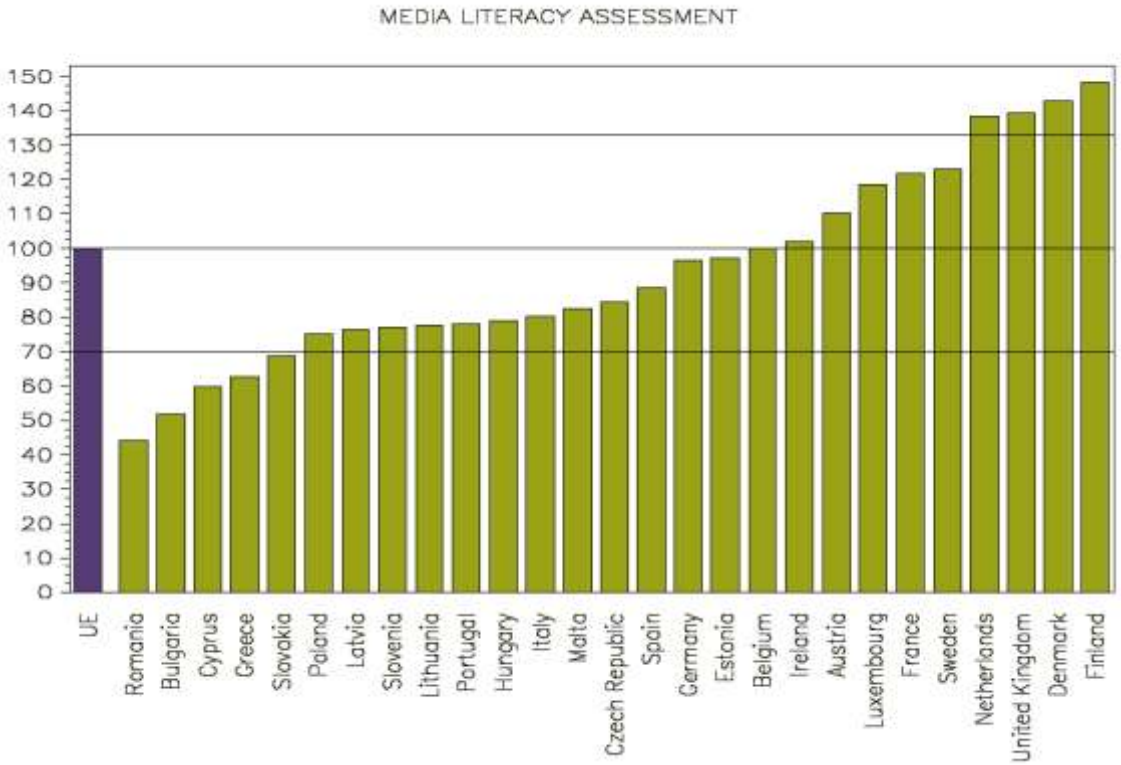
Table 7. Three levels of media literacy

LEVELS	*DIMENSIONS*	
	INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCIES	***ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS***
Basic	The individual has a set of abilities that allow a basic use of media. The user knows its function, deciphers its basic codes and uses it for specific ends. The user's capacity to critically analyze the information received is limited. Her/his communicative capacity through media is also limited.	The environment does not provide stimuli for the development of media literacy.
Medium	The individual has a medium level of media use, knowing in depth its function and is able to carry out complex operations. The user knows how to obtain and evaluate the information required, (s)he evaluates the information search strategies. The user is an active producer and participates socially.	The environment provides some stimuli but in a sporadic irregular way.
Advanced	The individual is an expert in media use, being aware of and interested in the legal conditions that affect its use. The user has an in-depth knowledge of the techniques and languages and can analyze and convert the conditions affecting her/his communicative relations and the production and communication of messages. In the public sphere, the user is capable of activating cooperation groups that allow her/him to solve problems.	The environment provides systematic stimuli. Actions are coordinated to develop a media literate population.

*Adapted from the Study (2009).

Accordingly, resting upon the measured and deduced indicators, the following assessment of media literacy levels of the Member States of the European Union has been made shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Media literacy assessment in Europe



Above 130 – Advanced
70-130 – Medium
Below 70 – Basic

*Adapted from the Study (2009).

This assessment comprises both Environmental Factors and Individual Competences. As we can see, the average European value was set at 100, however, many countries are found in the range of 60 to 80. Thus, the advanced levels of media literacy are found in Finland, Denmark, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands. Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Slovakia conform to the basic level of media literacy. All the other countries lie within the range of 70 to 130 that corresponds to the medium level of media literacy.

However, in terms of the European average (100), we might distinguish between four types – or groups – of countries: (1) those that scored somewhat below the average (Estonia, Germany, Spain, the Czech Republic, Malta, Italy, Hungary, Portugal, Lithuania, Slovenia, Latvia and Poland), (2) those that scored somewhat above it (Sweden, France, Luxembourg, Austria, Ireland, Belgium), (3) those that scored essentially above the average (also

conforming to the countries of the advances levels – the Netherlands, UK, Denmark, Finland), and, finally, (4) those that scored by far below the value of 100 (also conforming to the countries of the basic levels of media literacy – Slovakia, Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania). On the basis of this subdivision, I chose for my research three countries from three different groups described above: Italy (which belongs to the group scored somewhat below the European average), Austria (which is scored somewhat above the average), and the Netherlands (which is resided in the "advanced" group of countries). The Member States of the fourth group were left out of consideration due to a significant problem related to translation of my study questionnaire and treatment news messages into those countries' languages.

In addition to the assessment of overall media literacy levels by countries, each of its dimensions, as well as their components also have been evaluated with a particular value allowing additional comparisons between countries by distinct building blocks of media literacy. For clarity, Table 8 provides data specifically on the three countries picked over for my research.

Table 8. The Netherlands, Austria, and Italy assessment by media literacy dimensions and their components*

Country	Individual Competencies				Environmental Factors			Total
	Use Skills	Commu-nicative Abilities	Critical Under standing	Total Individual Competencies	Media Availability	Media Literacy Context	Total Environmental Factors	
EU-27	**100**	**100**	**0**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
Netherlands	141,51	138,51	0	141,51	102,73	135,11	121,19	136,69
Austria	124,12	111,4	0	124,12	95,11	91,63	91,4	110,17
Italy	68,4	57,36	0	68,4	90,15	92,35	93,13	79,03

Above 130 – Advanced level
70-130 – Medium level
Below 70 – Basic level

*Adapted from the Study (2009).

The figures listed in Table 8 will further be used for comparison purposes along with data on critical evaluation of manipulated media information.

2.4.2.2 . The Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe

After the report on the "Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels" (2009) was published, a follow-up research was conducted on behalf of the European Commission and under the authority of the European Association for Viewers Interests (EAVI) and the Danish Technological Institute titled "The Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe" and made public in 2011. Regarding its importance to this thesis, the new Study not only sustained importance of media literacy in democratization qualifying it as a "strategic value" for the EU and proved many previous findings, but also reconfirmed the overall media literacy ranking of the three countries included in the thesis research: the Netherlands fell into the category of the most 'advanced' countries, Italy was classified as one of the least advanced ones, and Austria was between the two. Moreover, the ranking of the mentioned countries according to critical understanding component, measured in the new Study, corresponded to the countries rank order distribution in overall media literacy ranking, with the Netherlands at the top, Italy at the bottom, and Austria in between.

In this way, the three countries' overall media literacy ranks were taken for measures of advancement of media literacy context in this research. In other words, the most advanced, or favorable, media literacy context was assigned to the Netherlands, and the least one - to Italy. Hence, it was expected that more favorable media literacy context should also have a general positive effect on individual ability to critically assess media information, in particular, as to spotting manipulation in news reports and rejecting a standpoint promoted by such reports.

Part 5. Exploratory Questions and Hypotheses

This thesis seeks to answer two principal research questions: what effects, if any, individual political competence and media literacy context have on (1) spotting manipulation in Internet news reports on novel issues in foreign affairs as well as (2) accepting at face value standpoints the manipulated news reports introduce.

Thus, taking into account the considerations and past studies results discussed in previous parts of this chapter, four hypotheses are developed for this study.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) states: *The higher the political competence level individuals have, the more likely they spot manipulated information in the Internet news reports on a novel international affairs topic.*

Extending the line of political competence effects, **Hypothesis 2** (H2) states: *The higher the political competence level individuals have, the less likely the standpoint of the manipulated news report will be accepted.*

Both H1 and H2 were developed on the following premises:

- the developed political schemas heavily contribute to political learning, more careful consideration of persuasive messages and inferring more accurate conclusions from political communications (Hsu & Price, 1993; Nelson et al., 1997; Rhee & Cappella, 1997);

- more politically sophisticated citizens are more resistant to persuasive messages because they have already known the arguments used and, being more knowledgeable, are capable more readily to deconstruct and reject them, especially if the arguments prove to be counterattitudinal (Nelson et sl., 1997);

- political experts, are more capable to identify important parts of information, encode it in more abstract ways, and employ deeper analytic techniques for its processing (Kinder, 1990), and political competence is a "significant predictor of the extent of subjects' analytic processing" (Hsu and Price, 1993, p.687);

- "the dependence on intelligence should be greater for political than for many other sorts of knowledge, because politics is more abstract and remote – simply "harder material" – than, say, sports or cooking" (Luskin, 1990, p.336).

Hypothesis 3 (H3) states**:** *The more advanced media literacy context a particular country has, the more likely participants from that country will spot manipulated information in the Internet news reports on a novel international affairs topic.* The premises H3 was grounded on were the following:

- "it is expected that the more favourable the context will be to media literacy, the highest level its population show" (the Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels in the Member States of the European Union, Final Report, 2009, p. 72);

- "the relationship between an individual's skills and Environmental Factors is two-way – a more favorable environmental context enhances individual media literacy levels, and the existence of media literate citizens compels the development of coordinated policies and actions" (the Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels in the Member States of the European Union, Final Report, 2009, p. 78).

Finally, utilizing the logical reasoning that spotting manipulation in news reports and rejecting, thus, the manipulated standpoints promoted in those news reports, **Hypothesis 4** (H4) states: *Those who are able to spot manipulated media information will not accept the standpoint promoted in the information.*

In addition to the hypotheses, I formulate four additional, exploratory questions.

Given that informed media mistrust is expected to be related to the critical thinking skills, that, in turn, are assumed to be related in a way to certain levels of political competence as well as media literacy context, **Exploratory Question 1** (EQ1) asks: *Is there a relationship between a country media literacy context and informed media mistrust?* By the same token, **Exploratory Question 2** (EQ2) asks: *Is there a relationship between political competence level and informed media mistrust?*

Further, taken into account that the news reports, used in the study as the stimuli, were supposedly taken from different types of the Internet news sources - either 'traditional' or 'alternative' - that might ultimately influence their perception as to credibility and persuasiveness by the study participants, **Exploratory Question 3** (EQ3) asks*: Is there a difference between perception of 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the manipulated news report regarding spotting manipulation and accepting the standpoint of the news report?*

Finally, bearing in mind that the target group of participants in the study were those aged 18-26, often referred to as 'heavy Internet users', the question arises whether the frequency of online news sources use makes them blear-eyed or clear-eyed regarding manipulation in the news. So **Exploratory Question 4** (EQ4) asks**:** *Is there a relationship between online sources use in a typical week for getting news and spotting manipulated media information as well as accepting its standpoint?*

In the next chapter I will set out the research design and methodology through which I will test the hypotheses and try to answer the questions raised - both my main research questions and my four additional, exploratory questions. I will also provide information about the study participants, questionnaire and stimuli as well as the study procedure.

CHAPTER III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

To test the just mentioned research questions and hypotheses, I employed an experimental design as the most appropriate in this case. Its appropriateness was dictated by the necessity of testing cause-effect hypotheses/assumptions, employing participants' random assignment to stimuli (in other words, to different treatment conditions), controlling for participants working individually as well as measurement specifics of the study variables. All of those factors along with some others are explained in more detail below in subsections 4.1 and 4.2.

3.1. The study variables

In experimental research, there are usually no unanimous terms referring to variables that hypothetically have effect and those that are supposed to be affected. The first ones are usually named as independent, predictor, treatment, explanatory etc. variables, while the second are named as dependent, criterion, outcome, response, etc. variables. If there are other variables that are manipulated in an experiment, they are named as, again, independent, manipulated variables or simply stimulus (stimuli) (see, for instance, Kittel et al, 2012; Druckman et al., 2011; Morton & Williams, 2010; Campbell & Stanley, 1973).

To avoid unnecessary and ineffective discussions as to whether, if named independent, a variable should definitely be manipulated to assess its effect on a dependent variable or, if named predictor, a variable should definitely predict something (not just be correlated with a response variable), in this study I refer to the variables expected having certain influence as explanatory, and to the variables influenced by the first as outcome ones. News reports used in the study with the purpose of uncovering relationships between explanatory and outcome variables are referred to here as *stimuli*. Only stimuli can be manipulated in the study, that is, fulfill the role of a manipulated variable, as having distinguishing slant (one-sided vs. balanced) and the type of the Internet news source they were allegedly taken from ('traditional' which is popular in a given country vs. 'alternative' which is popular in a given country).

The *first outcome variable* is spotting/non-spotting that information in the news report is one-sided, contains allegations and, overall, cannot be trusted. *The second outcome variable* refers to accepting/non-accepting the resulting standpoint(s) the manipulated news message (that one-sided and allegations dominated) promotes. Two explanatory variables supposedly

having influence onto both outcomes are political competence and media literacy context. They cannot be manipulated in this study and, for this reason, are referred to as quasi-experimental variables.

The *first quasi-experimental explanatory variable* is individual political competence. As was previously hypothesized, personal ability to critically evaluate [manipulated] media information and make relevant conclusions of it should also be a function of developed political competence due to the need of often evaluating various items of political information, sort through controversies, and revealing political allegations. The concept comprises five dimensions - political interest, media use, factual political knowledge, political discussion, and political participation – all of which were integrated into one scale. Political competence has been measured as a part of post-hoc analysis. The higher score a person had on the scale, the higher level of political competence was assumed. All questions measured political competence were identical except for the questions measured factual political knowledge about domestic political issues of a particular country. Therefore, to ensure comparability between the three countries included in the study on factual political knowledge dimension, questions used in the European Election Study 2009 for measuring factual political knowledge were employed for the reasons they were long term (not tied for time), showed different degree of difficulty, standardized across countries, finally, time-proven.

The *second quasi-experimental explanatory variable* – media literacy context – resulted from the Member States media literacy ranking. According to this, the three countries selected for the study - differ in their ranks: the Netherlands possesses the advanced level of media literacy, Austria has a medium-high level and is ranked above European average, and Italy with its medium-low level is ranked below European average (see Table 9).

Table 9. Overall media literacy ranks as media literacy context for Austria, Italy and the Netherlands*

Country	Overall media literacy rank
EU-27 average	***100***
Italy	79.03
Austria	110.17
Netherlands	136.69

Above 130 – Advanced level
70-130 – Medium level
Below 70 – Basic level

*Adapted from the Study (2009).

Thus, the media literacy context variable was stable or constant for each of the countries, and the political competence variable could vary. In effect, with these two variables six possible configuration outcomes were anticipated: (1) both political competence and media literacy context are not associated with the outcome variable(s); (2) political competence is and media literacy context is not associated with the outcome variable(s); (3) political competence is not and media literacy context is associated with the outcome variable(s); and (4) both political competence and media literacy context are associated with the outcome variable(s) (Table 10). In actual fact, only the latter configuration would pose difficulties with the clear separation of influence onto the outcome variables between the political competence component and the media literacy context.

Table 10. Possible association relationships between explanatory and outcome variables

Explanatory variables	**Possible configurations with regard to outcome variables***			
Political competence	-	+	-	+
Media literacy	-	-	+	+
Explanation	Both not associated	Only PC associated	Only ML associated	Both associated

* PC - political competence, ML - media literacy

3.2. Research Design

The study has been conducted in the form of a series of survey-based laboratory experiments/quasi-experiments that employed between-subjects posttest-only design. In short (details are provided below in the subsequent sections of this chapter), first, the study participants answered questions measuring their media habits, media trust, and political competence. Then they read stimuli - news reports. Finally, they answered questions measuring their evaluation of the news reports and demographics. Moreover, one of the questions measuring political competence measured the study participants' attitudes toward the two countries mentioned in the news reports. This question was not intended to contribute to measuring political competence but served for control purposes, as the participants' attitudes toward those countries may have affected the upcoming participants' evaluation of the news reports.

The choice of the form/design of the experiment has been conditioned by the following reasons.

1. Testing cause-effect hypotheses/assumptions .

According to Roth's (1995) identification of tasks that are attempted to be solved by means of experiments, there are three different yet often intertwined purposes experiments are usually employed for:

1) *Searching for facts*, which is mostly used as an additional method for observational research for getting some complementary data that enables light to be shed on the conflicting results of different observations. With this purpose, there ordinarily is no need for exercising random assignment.
2) *Speaking to theorists* refers to testing assumptions, hypotheses, theories and further contributing to the theory (in the global sense of the word).
3) *Whispering in the ears of princes* – this poetic title means only that experimenters cooperate with policy-makers in virtue of simulating in their experiments certain natural settings for testing something which is useful for specific policy purposes.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned three purposes of carrying out experiments are not mutually-exclusive, and one and the same experiment might well comprise two or even all of them. Thus, my study combines both the first and second purposes, as it is based on certain research data which should be further specified (as to relationships between an individual's critical media information assessment and countries' media literacy contexts), as well as on some theoretical premises (as to relationships between individual's political competence and his/her critical media information assessment ability).

2. Employing random assignment

In the recently published *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* Druckman et al (2011) referred to an experiment as "a deliberate test of a causal proposition, typically with random assignment to conditions" designed by investigators "to evaluate the causal impacts of potentially informative explanatory variables" (p. 2). Having in the study two types of news reports (subdivided further into two more subtypes) that served as stimuli, it was necessary to randomly assign participants to read one of the four. In this way, this would allow for individual levels of political competence, the second explanatory variable, as well as other variables that were also randomized, as anyone of the participants could be placed in any of the four 'conditions'.

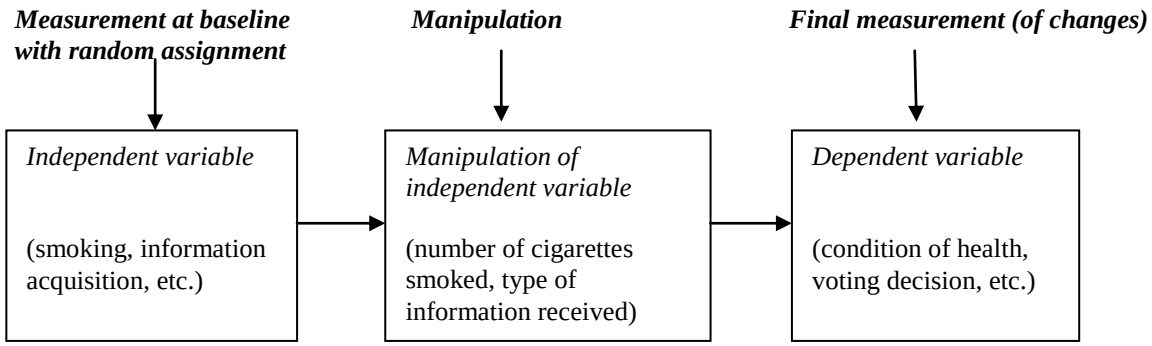
3. Controlling for participants working individually

Given that the second explanatory variable in the study, individual political competence, was to be measured during experimental sessions, and stimuli were to be evaluated also on an individual basis, it was necessary to carry out the study in controlled settings so as to ensure that participants answered questions individually, without seeking help from each other. For this reason, all the experimental sessions in all three countries were conducted in classroom settings that substituted for laboratory ones. This allowed for controlling that participants worked individually.

4. Impossibility of manipulating explanatory variables and employment of random sampling

Usually, when an experiment consists of the manipulation of a treatment variable (independent variable or X), followed by observation of a response variable (dependent variable or Y), it is referred to as a *true experiment*. In other words, in such research individuals are randomly assigned to different conditions or levels of an independent/treatment variable (combination of variables) to see what effect can be measured on the dependent/response variable. For the sake of simplicity, when measuring the effects of smoking on individuals' health, a researcher would observe how many cigarettes individuals smoked during a certain period of time and then measure how their health would be affected depending on the number of cigarettes. Participants in a control group would not smoke, of course. In this example, the independent/treatment variable would be the number of cigarettes smoked, and this variable could be manipulated. Or, to take an another example: influence of information on voting decisions. Here, a researcher would present individuals with specific information on, say, political candidates as an independent/treatment variable and then the individuals decide who they would vote for. Participants in a control group would not receive any information. Again, information as a variable could be manipulated and its effects, depending on the variants of manipulations, measured. Schematically such type of experiment looks as follows (Figure 3):

Figure 3. Typical scheme of a true experiment (sometimes fallaciously considered as the only correct type for experiments)



Such pretest-posttest experimental design, usually along with employing a random sampling procedure, is sometimes, fallaciously, considered as the only 'correct' and 'authoritative' form of experiments.

However, for various reasons, it is far from always feasible or justifiable for a researcher to manipulate an independent/treatment/explanatory variable(s), have random samples, match treatment and control groups, or have a control group in the study altogether. For example, the independent variable might be something that has already existed in the population and cannot be manipulated by a researcher (say, gender, age, or countries' media literacy ranks that were already measured and already exist). Or, it may be useless to manipulate an independent variable as there is no goal to measure how it would change at the posttest stage (as is the case with the second explanatory variable, political competence, in this study). Also, employing random samples in experiments does not always seem feasible or even reasonable. Experimentation is a sequential process, and usually, before coming to some 'ultimate' results, a researcher goes through various 'intermediate' stages of refining theory, changing or adding to explanatory variables and accumulating solid evidence. Thus, when it comes particularly to theory testing experimental studies, it would be purely precarious and extravagant from the perspective of effort, time and money to use random samples of participants at every stage of the theory development, starting from the earliest one.

Consequently, as the goal of this study is to build and test a theory, not to generalize one, there was no preoccupation with external validity or generalizability of a causal inference. The focus was on internal validity as a *sine qua non* in theory-testing experiments. In addition, when speaking of external validity, I agree with Druckman and Kam (2011) who warned against prioritizing the sample issue for generalizability of experiment results. Instead, the external validity assessment has to embrace "multiple dimensions, including the sample,

context, time, and conceptual operationalization" (Druckman & Kam, 2011, p.53). From this point of view, the preoccupation with external validity in a single experiment, that became a "near obsession" at critics of experiments, according to McDermott (2002), often just does not make sense.

As to 'violations' of conditions of a true experiment, even in this case causal relationships between independent/treatment/explanatory and dependent/response/outcome variables still can be uncovered. Here, the situation is somewhat similar to an observational design where two naturally occurred variables are measured and correlated. This is a *quasi-experiment* which is also frequently used in various fields of science including the social sciences. In a nutshell, while a true experiment usually includes such elements as (1) *pre-post test design*, (2) a *treatment group* and a *control group*, and (3) *random assignment of participants to different conditions*, and sometimes (4) *random samples of participants*, quasi-experiments usually lack one or more of these design elements.

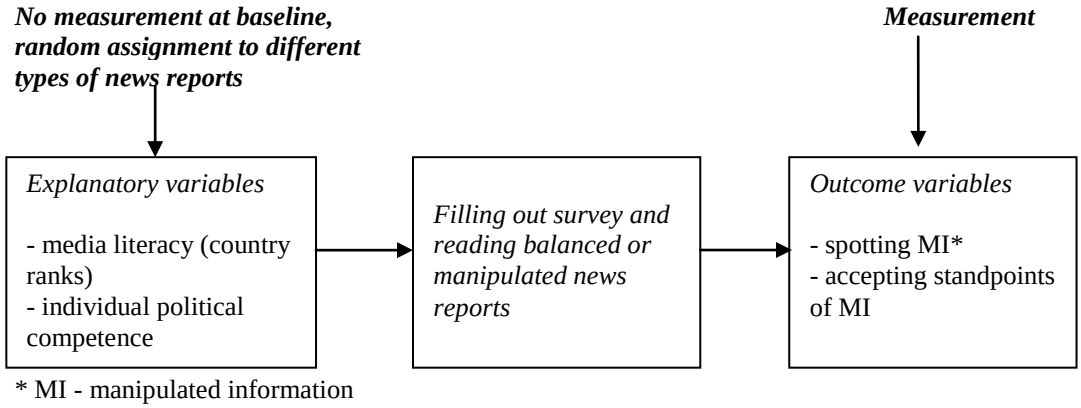
In this regard, I share the approach proposed by Morton and Williams (2010) who defined experiments more broadly as "an intervention by a researcher into the DGP [data generating process] through manipulation of the elements of the DGP" (p. 50). The researchers emphasized that experiments as a form of scientific investigation have existed long before the introduction of random assignment in 20th century and still allowed for the uncovering causal relationships between variables. Thus, if on this basis many studies without random assignment would be considered as non-experiments that can bring no valuable inferences, many prominent studies that brought scientific breakthroughs, such as, for instance, those leading to discovering the smallpox vaccine, should also be classified theoretically as 'non-experiments having non-valuable inferences'. However, from the practical point of view, the significance of such 'non-experiments' is in point of fact invaluable. Morton and Williams (2010) stated bluntly:

> The fact that a study does not include randomization or baselines or the randomization suffers from problems, in our view, does not make it less of an experiment, just as an experiment in which control is minimal is not less than an experiment. ...we think it is important not to confound definitions of experiments with normative views of desirable properties because what is desirable in an experiment depends on the research goal - what the researcher seeks to learn - as well as the opportunities before the researcher. What is ideal in the experiment also depends on where it is conducted. In field experiments,

random assignment can be extremely valuable, although difficult, because control is less available; in the laboratory, the opposite relationships holds although both control and random assignment can be much easier to implement. It would be unreasonable for us to define interventions outside the laboratory, where there are disconnects between manipulations, and what happens to subjects because of a lack of control or problems with the implementation of random assignment as not really experiments, just as we think it is unreasonable to define interventions without random assignment and baselines as not really experiments. (p. 49-50)

As I stated before, in this study I could not manipulate explanatory variables (countries' media literacy ranks and individual political competence) and employ random samples of participants. However, I use the element of random assignment of participants to reading different stimuli as well as treatment and control groups. Given that during the experimental sessions the study participants filled out a pen-and-paper survey and that variables and stimuli effects were measured post-hoc, this research is referred to as survey-based posttest only experiment/quasi-experiment study. Schematically, this particular experiment looks as follows (Figure 4):

Figure 4. Scheme of the present survey-based posttest only experiment/quasi-experiment study



* MI - manipulated information

Thus posttest only design may be graphically described for two groups in the following form: "No Observation – Treatment – Measurement" (for a treatment group) and "No Observation – No Treatment – Measurement" (for a control group). In the second case, "no treatment" means not only that the control groups does not receive any treatment, but also that

it might receive a sort of a neutral treatment which is still regarded as “no treatment”. Here, this implied that the control group was assigned to read a balanced news report under one of two conditions -- it was allegedly taken from (1) a traditional Internet news source (websites of newspapers TV channels, magazines, news agencies, etc.) or from (2) an alternative Internet news source (blogs, social networks).

3.3. Stimuli

Two short simulated news reports - one manipulated and one balanced - were used as stimuli in the study. Both news reports were written by the researcher who for 15 years had worked as a professional political journalist in his country. The reports were approximately the same length (280 words) and initially written in English.

Both news reports described a protest march which supposedly took place in Moldova and the death of a protester (or deaths of protesters in the manipulated version of the report) during the protest march. Also, both news reports assigned responsibility for the death(s) to the police/president in the manipulated version and the police/president or the protester herself/himself (due to heart attack) in the balanced version. At the same time, the manipulated version of the news report:

- lacked the context of the protest march;
- misled the report readers beginning right from its headline “Peaceful protesters now die in Europe: They want free elections and democratic rule”;
- contained unfounded statements (allegations) such as “At least one demonstrator is killed by police” or “the President gave direct orders to the police to use violence”, in this way, assigning responsibility for the situation;
- was completely one-sided in the absence of any opposite viewpoints;
- integrated framing and reasoning devices including unfounded speculations about the horrific consequences of the situation described.

The balanced version of the news report:

- provided the event context beginning from the headline “Grassroots show of support in Moldova Republic against atrocities of Syrian regime results in death of protester”;
- indicated the possible cause of the death but did not insist on it: “Emergency doctors claim death caused by heart attack; in-depth inquiry to be carried out into the case nevertheless”;
- contained the opposition’s viewpoint (from the manipulated version of the report)

about the responsibility of the police and the president but also presented opinions of the chief of the police and the president regarding the situation described and the accusations leveled against them;

- the language of this report is neutral rather than excessively emotional.

Thus the two reports are different in their appeal: if the manipulated one was supposed to persuade readers, the balanced one was supposed to inform them about the situation resting upon the neutral treatment of facts and balanced presentation of opposing viewpoints.

Both news reports were not formatted to look like actual copies of online news reports of particular Internet news sources. It was clear that different news sources had different degree of likeability and trustworthiness for different participants, not to mention that the reports were allegedly taken either from a 'traditional' or an 'alternative' Internet news source. Therefore, it was not only impossible in this situation "to average" such sources to be likeable by, at least, the majority of the study participants, but also useless as the purpose of the study was not to test the trustworthiness, fairness, balance, etc. of particular Internet news sources in a particular country. For this reason, the study stimuli were introduced by the following phrases, both in writing on the questionnaires as well as spoken out loud by the researcher before the start of each experiment session: *"The following news report was taken from one of the most popular traditional [*or *alternative] Internet sources of news in your country. In order to avoid identifying the source through any of its characteristics, only the text of the news report is reprinted here in a standard computer font".*

Since both manipulated and balanced news reports were presented in two subtypes each - 'taken from a traditional Internet news source' and 'taken from an alternative Internet news source', in total, there turned out to be four versions of the news reports. Subsequently, they were coded from 1 to 4, where '1' referred to 'balanced version / traditional Internet news source', '2' referred to 'balanced version / alternative Internet news source', '3' referred to 'manipulated version / traditional Internet news source' and '4' referred to 'manipulated version / alternative Internet news source'.

The initial English language news reports were pretested online using the *QuestionPro* platform among English-language native speakers-PhD researchers of the European University Institute. Thirty-five persons were asked to evaluate whether the news reports imitated a real modern vital style of Internet news media language. Having obtained the feedback, some minor corrections were made to the reports. Both news reports were then translated into Italian and German by native speakers of the respective languages – Italian and

German language teachers from the Language Center of the European University Institute. Furthermore, the translated versions were pretested online using *QuestionPro* platform among Italian- and German-language native speakers-PhD researchers of the European University Institute. Twenty-seven German native speakers and twenty-eight Italian native speakers were asked to evaluate whether the news reports imitated the real modern vital style of the language of Internet news media in their countries. After the feedback had been obtained, some minor corrections were made to the Italian-language versions. With regard to the German-language versions of the news reports, it was pointed out that some phrases resembled a kind of old-fashioned language. To resolve the issue, a German-speaking former journalist and public relations practitioner, who was working at that time at EUI, was asked to edit the aforementioned parts of the news reports. After all the corrections had been done, both news reports were pretested again and achieved good estimates with regard to the language used.

Both versions of the news reports - manipulated and balanced - in all the three languages can be found in Appendix B.

3.4. Pretest of the questionnaires along with the study stimuli

Prior to carrying out the actual study, all the questionnaires in three languages - English, Italian and German - were also pretested online. The questionnaire was initially developed in English. Then a native English-language speaker, an English language teacher from the Language Center of the European University Institute, was asked to proofread the questionnaire and make necessary syntactical corrections to it in close coordination with the researcher. Furthermore, the questionnaire was pretested for clarity purposes, and again corrected afterwards. It was then translated into Italian and German by respective native language speakers – teachers of Italian and German from the Language Center of the European University Institute. After translation, both the Italian-language version and the German-language version were pretested online for clarity and then subsequently corrected to take the final form.

The questions on the questionnaires were presented with the wording and sequence that they had in the actual pencil-and-paper questionnaires. The stimuli were also inserted into the place where they should have been found - after the set of questions measuring political competence. The QuestionPro Survey Software was used for conducting the online pretest. The online survey within the software was created, sent, and then analyzed by the researcher. Of course, the software did not allow for creating the survey questionnaire to look strictly the same as its paper version. However, the purpose of the online pretest was not to test the

questionnaire and news reports in settings similar to the real experiment. The purpose was to pretest the questionnaire in different languages for clarity and consistency. For this reason, I used what is called an 'expert pretest', when experts are informed beforehand about the real objectives of the survey (study) and asked to give their opinions on the questions included in the survey: wording, clarity, consistency etc. Therefore, the English, Italian and German native speakers - PhD researchers of the European University Institute, were asked to answer the survey questions and read news reports in their languages and provide evaluations and comments about the questionnaire afterwards. The invitation that was sent to the 'experts' included the following specification: *"What I would ask you is to answer the survey questions along with reading a news message included as if you were taking a real survey, that is, without any intentional nit-picking. But if, while completing the survey, you unequivocally see with your fresh eye that, for instance, some questions look unclear or are formulated ambiguously, or answer options are too restricted, or something else, please send me your comments / notes (along with the survey, of course) either in a specific field in the very end of the survey or as a reply to [e-mail address]".* Of course, only two versions of the news reports were included in the online survey – the manipulated and the balanced. No further subdivision into traditional or alternative Internet news sources was made. The English-language "balanced" version of the survey was completed by 21 participants; the English-language "manipulated" version of the survey was completed by 14 participants; the Italian-language "balanced" version of the survey was completed by 17 participants; the Italian-language "manipulated" version of the survey was completed by 11 participants; the German-language "balanced" version of the survey was completed by 15 participants; the German-language "manipulated" version of the survey was completed by 12 participants. As a result of the online pretest, some corrections in the wording of the questions and language structure were made.

The lack of the necessary resources did not allow for the carrying out of the questionnaire pretests in three languages with audiences similar to the intended participants of the real study and in settings resembling the supposed ones. None of those who participated in the online pretest of the questionnaires took part in the actual study.

3.5. Participants

The study participants were, with few exceptions, undergraduate students from one large Austrian university, one large Italian university, and one large Dutch university. In total, 1019 persons from the three countries participated in the study. Of those, there were 288

Austrian participants, 408 Italian participants, and 323 Dutch participants. Only those who indicated citizenship of the countries where the study was carried out were regarded as eligible for the study. Thus, participants who had a different citizenship or did not indicate their citizenship at all were excluded from further analysis.

As a result, after cleaning the datasets on the citizenship dimension and excluding those whose questionnaires eventually appeared to be blank or not filled out in the sections measuring political competence and the outcome variables, the total number of the study participants shrank to 914 persons: specifically, 246 participants from Austria, 394 participants from Italy and 274 participants from the Netherlands.

Given that the primary age category in the study was 18-26 year olds, that is, those who were referred to as the 'heaviest' Internet users, for the purpose of statistical analysis, the Austrian and Italian samples were subdivided into several age categories: the Austrian sample into two age categories (18-26 year olds and 27 < year olds), and the Italian sample into three age categories (18-26 year olds, 27-35 year olds, and 36≤ year olds). The Dutch sample comprised participants of the targeted age category only (18-26 year olds). Statistical tests were then made (1) for the combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample of those aged 18-26 years, and (2) for each of the three relatively sizable age categories of the Italian sample - the largest of the three countries involved. For the Italian sample, this made it possible to make comparative implications as to various relationships between age and other variables, including one of the explanatory variables, political competence, and both the outcome variables. The frequency distributions and measures of central tendency and deviation for the three age categories and gender by countries are shown in Table 11 and Table 12:

Table 11. Frequency distributions and measures of central tendency and deviation for three age categories (by country and for the combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample)

Age category	Countries			Combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample
	Austria	Italy	Netherlands	
18-26	N = 225 *M* = 21.3 SD = 1.7 Range = 8	N = 237 *M* = 22 SD = 2 Range = 7	N = 274 *M* = 19.8 SD = 1,7 Range = 7	**N = 736 (80,6%)** ***M* = 21** **SD = 2** **Range = 8**
27-35	N = 15 *M* = 30 SD = 2.4 Range = 7	N = 85 *M* = 30.1 SD = 2.7 Range = 8	--	**N = 100 (11%)** ***M* = 30.2** **SD = 2.6** **Range = 8**
36 ≤	N = 5 *M* = 38 SD = 2.1 Range = 5	N = 72 *M* = 43.4 SD = 5,5 Range = 23	--	**N = 77 (8,4%)** ***M* = 43.1** **SD = 5.5** **Range = 23**
TOTAL	**N = 246**** ***M* = 22.2** **SD = 3.6** **Range = 23**	**N = 394** ***M* = 28** **SD = 8.7** **Range = 40**	**N = 274** ***M* = 19.8** **SD = 1.7** **Range = 7**	**N = 914 (100%)**** ***M* = 23.8** **SD = 7** **Range = 41**

**913 participants marked their age; 1 participant from Austria did not indicate her/his age

Table 12. Gender by three age categories (by country and for the combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample)

Age category	Countries			Combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample
	Austria	Italy	Netherlands	
18-26	N = 225 F = 151 (67,1%) M = 74 (32,9%)	N = 237 F = 156 (65,8%) M = 81 (34,2%)	N = 274 F = 136 (49,6%) M = 138 (50,4%)	**N = 736** **F = 443 (60,2%)** **M = 293 (39,8%)**
27-35	N = 15 F = 4 (26,7%) M = 11 (73,3%)	N = 85 F = 59 (69,4%) M = 26 (30,6%)	--	**N = 100** **F = 63 (63%)** **M = 37 (37%)**
36 ≤	N = 5 F = 2 (40%) M = 3 (60%)	N = 72 F = 49 (68,1%) M = 23 (31,9%)	--	**N = 77** **F = 51 (66,2%)** **M = 26 (33,8%)**
TOTAL	**N = 246**** **F = 157 (63,8%)** **M = 88 (36,2%)**	**N = 394** **F = 264 (67%)** **M = 130 (33%)**	**N = 274** **F = 136 (49,6%)** **M = 138 (50,4%)**	**N = 914**** **F = 557 (60,9%)** **M = 356 (39,1%)**

**913 participants marked their gender; 1 participant from Austria did not indicate her/his gender

The participants were randomly assigned to read one of four versions of the news reports included into the study questionnaire so that an approximately equal number of participants in each country would read each news report. The distribution of the number of

participants for the age category of 18-26 years old is shown below in Table 13.

Table 13. Distribution of the number of participants by news report types (by country and for the combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample)

Type of news reports	Countries			Combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample
	Austria	Italy	Netherlands	
Balanced traditional	58 *(25,8%)*	68 *(28,7%)*	67 *(24,5%)*	**193**
Balanced alternative	50 *(22,2%)*	57 *(24,1%)*	71 *(25,9%)*	**178**
Manipulated traditional	57 *(25,3%)*	40 *(16,9%)*	67 *(24,5%)*	**164**
Manipulated alternative	60 (26,7%)	72 (30,4%)	69 *(25,2%)*	**201**
TOTAL	**225 (100%)**	**237 (100%)**	**274 (100%)**	**736**

As is seen from Table 13, the number of participants who read each type of the news reports varied depending, first, on the total number of participants in the given age category, and, second, on the total number of participants of different ages and citizenships in a given sample. The latter was illustrative of the Austrian sample with 50 participants who read the balanced alternative version of the news report and, especially, of the Italian sample where only 40 participants in the age category of 18-26 years old read the manipulated traditional version of the news report. Taking into consideration that an audience of participants in a given experiment session often comprised people of various age (which is, in particular, true for Italy) and citizenship (which is, in particular, true for Austria), such skewness, or disproportionality, in the number of participants for a certain condition seems rather to be a consistent outcome, even if unfavorable.

3.6. The study questionnaire

The questions for the study questionnaire were partly developed by the researcher and partly adopted - and, in some cases, modified - from previous research in political and communication sciences. The questionnaire virtually consisted of three parts – (1) pre-stimuli questions, (2) stimuli, and (3) post-stimuli questions. In turn, the pre-stimuli part encompassed three sections: (a) one measured the use of and trustworthiness toward particular

types of news media, (b) one measured informed media mistrust, and, finally, (c) the last measured political competence. The aforementioned sections were intentionally arranged in an order starting from simpler questions on media use, then putting questions on informed media mistrust, and finishing with more difficult questions asking participants about their political interest, activities and knowledge. Here it is important to stress that the second section (b) – questions measuring informed media mistrust – had been deliberately separated from the stimuli part (reading a news report) by the longer section measuring political competence. The reason for such a disposition was to avoid possible priming effects on participants from the questions on the informed media mistrust that may have resulted if those questions were placed directly before the stimulus, the news report. In other words, if participants answered the questions about their trust in the news media right before reading the news reports, they would more likely have been influenced by those questions and, while reading, evaluated the news reports more thoroughly based on the ideas of the mentioned media trust questions. For this reason, such separation decreased the likelihood of priming participants by questions on trust in news media.

Now I will elaborate specifically on the questions of the study questionnaire.

3.6.1. Pre-stimuli questions

3.6.1.1. Use and trustworthiness of news media

The **first section** of the pre-stimuli part of the questionnaire comprised three questions that were all generated by the researcher. The first one (Q1) asked *"to indicate on the scale from 0 to 7, where "0" means "never" and "7" means "every day", how many days in a typical week participants use the following sources to get news of any kind"*. The sources were represented by the following options: online sources, magazines, newspapers, radio, and television. The term "online sources" was selected purposefully instead of "Internet", as the former was construed to include online versions of magazines, newspapers, radio, TV channels, news agencies, news aggregators, newsletters, etc. So a person could read, for instance, a newspaper but its online version, not its print edition. This suggestion was also repeatedly confirmed by participants during pretest (pilot test) of the questionnaire. Thus Q1 was intended to measure how often in a typical week participants got news and from which news media. The frequency of news consumption should have been indicative of the scope of experience of dealing with news of different types (likely including manipulated ones) and evaluating it, whether critically or not. The preferences in types of news media, from which news was gotten most often, should have allowed for making certain conclusions as to what

degree participants were used to dealing with news messages from online news sources, which is important given that the study stimuli were allegedly taken from one of them.

The second question (Q2) asked about the trustworthiness of different news sources: "*In general, when thinking of these types of media as sources of credible news, do you regard some of them as more trustworthy than others? Please indicate your choices on the following scale from 1 to 7, where '1' is 'not at all trustworthy' and '7' is 'very trustworthy'".* The answer options were as follows: Internet, magazines, newspapers, radio, television. Here "Internet" replaced "online sources" from the first question as the issue was 'types of media', not 'news sources'. In other words, the Internet can be referred to as a type of media, whereas online news sources cannot. Q2 was intended to take a comparative look at how trustworthy the Internet was regarded in comparison to other types of media. The emphasis of the Internet was vital, given that the stimuli in this study were asserted to have been taken from Internet news sources.

Finally, the third question (Q3) asked directly about the trustworthiness of distinct types of the Internet news sources – traditional and alternative ones – specifying what was meant by those terms. In particular, the question read: "*In general, when thinking of the Internet as a source of credible news, how would you rate the trustworthiness of traditional Internet news sources (that is, news websites of TV channels, newspapers, magazines, etc.) and alternative Internet news sources (that is, social networks, blogs)? Please indicate your opinion on the following scale, where '1' is ' not at all trustworthy' and '7' is 'very trustworthy'".* There were two answer options: 'traditional' Internet news sources (websites of TV channels, newspapers, magazines, etc.) and 'alternative' Internet news sources (social networks, blogs). Q3 was intended to measure whether there was any difference between trustworthiness toward the two types of the Internet news sources. This was important to measure, given that the stimuli in this study were allegedly taken from a popular (in a given country) 'traditional' or alternative Internet news source. Accordingly, those who would find traditional Internet news sources more reliable may have questioned the fairness and reliability of the news report that was 'taken from alternative Internet news sources'. And vice versa: those who would find alternative Internet news sources more reliable might have mistrusted the news report allegedly 'taken from traditional Internet news sources'. In essence, this measure has been incorporated into the study for control purposes.

Both Q2 and Q3 included 7-point semantic differential scales that were selected for three main reasons: (1) to avoid potential confusion if each of the questions had a scale with a different number of points (say, 5-point scale in one case, and 7-point scale in another); (2)

giving participants more freedom to choose a score-answer option; and (3) including a middle point (as distinct from, say, 4-point scale). In effect, the literature and previous studies do not provide convincing arguments that, for example, the 5-point scale is better than the 7-point scale (for overview and mathematical evidence, see Colman, Norris & Preston, 1997). Therefore, I chose to use the last one.

3.6.1.2. Measuring informed media mistrust

The **second section** included five questions/statements and was introduced with the phrase: *"How often do the following statements apply to your own experience of getting news from various types of media?"* The first statement (Q4 in the questionnaire) was: *"I find that news media reports are fair and balanced".* The second statement (Q5 in the questionnaire) was: *"I believe that facts and opinions (that is, interpretations of those facts) are clearly separated in news media reports"*. The third statement (Q6 in the questionnaire) was: *"In my opinion, the interpretations of facts in news reports are based on solid grounds and not mere assertions"*. The fourth statement (Q7 in the questionnaire) was: "*I try to 'read between the lines' of what I see/read in the news".* The last statement (Q8 in the questionnaire) was: *"Overall, I can trust news media reports".* All the questions / statements had four identical answer options: always, most of the time, rarely, never. For the purposes of statistical analysis, they were later numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, respectively.

The first, third and fifth statements (Q4, Q6 and Q8, correspondingly) were developed by the researcher. Statement three (Q5) was adapted from Gunter (1992). Statement four (Q7) was adapted from Eveland (2005), who used it for measuring the individual active information-processing strategy. All the others were generated by the researcher. All the questions / statements were intended to measure how trustful or skeptical people feel toward the news media in general. Or, in other words, they estimated what I referred to in my study as informed media mistrust.

The questions / statements Q4, Q5, Q6 and Q8 were combined into one composite scale - *informed media mistrust scale* (Cronbach's alpha for the Austrian sample was 0.73, for the Italian one 0.62, and for the Dutch one 0.63; for the combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample Cronbach's alpha was 0.66), whereas Q7 was left off the scale, for its inclusion has reduced Cronbach's alpha significantly - to 0.50 or even less. The differences in the reliability coefficient were likely due to the score variance in the samples. As a rule, Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 and higher is considered desirable. However, values of 0.60 and higher are also

acceptable, especially, for exploratory studies (Flynn et al. 1990, Hair et al. 1998), where certain concepts are measured for the first time, and to which the present research pertains.

3.6.1.3. Main explanatory variable - Political Competence

As was mentioned earlier in the text, the concept of political competence encompassed six components that were measured: political interest, intentional consumption of political news, political discussion, challenging opponent's standpoints during political discussions, political participation, and factual political knowledge. Therefore, the **third section** measured all the components and, eventually, produced an overall estimate for individual political competence. In total, there were eight questions in the section, seven of which directly referred to measuring the aforementioned components of political competence.

Political interest was measured by the question *"To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?"* (Q9 in the questionnaire) which had four answer options, numbered 1, 2, 3 and 4, respectively: not at all, a little, somewhat, very much. The question and the answer options were adopted from the EU Profiler project, a Voting Advice Application (VAA), which has been developed under the auspices of the European Union Democracy Observatory (EUDO) at the EUI. The advantages of adopting the question and its answer options from the EU Profiler were that (1) they were repeatedly 'verified' through their multiple practical use, and (2) they were already translated into the three languages used in my study – English, Italian, and German (for further information on the EU Profiler see Trechsel & Mair, 2011).

Consumption of political news was measured by the following question (Q10 in the questionnaire): *"On the following scale from 0 to 7, where "0"means "never" and "7" means "every day", please mark how many days in a typical week you intentionally watch, listen to, or read political information from news media".* This question was adapted from Kwak (1999). The answer option is quite obvious: the higher the score on the scale, the higher the frequency of intentional consumption of political news by a participant in a typical week.

Political discussion part was measured by two questions. The first of the two (Q 11 in the questionnaire), asked: *"In a typical week, how often do you discuss political issues with other people (classmates, neighbors, friends, family, acquaintances, or strangers)?"* The answer options were the following: never, once a week, 2 to 3 times a week, 4 to 5 times a week, 6 to 7 times a week, more than 7 times a week (numbered from 0 to 5, respectively). The second question (Q 12 in the questionnaire) specified: *"During your political discussions with others, how often, on average, do you try to challenge the standpoints of your opponent by arguing your case?"* The proposed answer options were: never, rarely, often, every time I

discuss politics (numbered from 0 to 3, respectively). Q11 was inspired by Eveland and Thomson (2006), but instead of the specification of the time period used in the mentioned study as "in the past 6 months", in my research I changed it for "in a typical week". In doing this, I intended to measure habitual rather than accidental actions. Besides it can be quite difficult to remember how many times one has discussed politics in the past 6 months. For the same reason, the number of times when politics was discussed was reduced in my study to "more than 7 times a week" instead of Eveland's "50 times and more" during the past half a year. Q12 was generated by the researcher and intended to estimate individuals' active participation in political discussions as distinct from merely listening or weakly objecting. I assumed that the frequent challenging of someone's political standpoints by an individual may have been indicative of the developed critical thinking power he or she possesses, which, in turn, was crucial for the ability to critically evaluate news media information.

Political participation was also measured by two questions. The first question (Q13), asked about the various political activities participants were involved in over the past two years, and the second question (Q14) asked whether participants intended to vote in the next elections, national and local. In particular, Q13 asked about ten types of activities that participants may have taken part in: *"ever written a letter to a newspaper on a political issue"*, *"joined a political organization", "already been a member of a political organization", ever written a letter to a politician or official", "ever signed a petition on a political issue", "ever participated in a march, demonstration, or protest", "voted in the recent national elections", "attended any political meetings or rallies", "voted in the recent local elections", "ever campaigned for a candidate/political party".* The answer options were categorical: "no" and "yes". Q14 asked whether participants intended to vote *"in the next national elections"* and *"in the next local elections".* The question had three answer options: no, yes, undecided. Q13 was adapted from and Q14 was inspired by Brady's (1999) overview of various scales of political activities. All the answer options of Q13 were then summed up in a 10-item scale measured political participation, where "0" meant the lowest level of political participation and "10" meant the highest level of political participation.

One of the ten types of activity in Q13 was, to a certain degree, not generally applicable. Asking about voting in the recent national elections in the past two years could not been answered positively by participants of the Italian sample as the most recent national elections had been held in 2008. Nevertheless, the Dutch general elections had been held in September 2012, and the Austrian presidential elections were held in 2010, both before this study was conducted in the aforementioned countries. So for the reason of having identical

questionnaires for all countries, the item on voting in the recent national elections was included, too. Otherwise, if participants were asked about their political activities in the past five years, instead of the past two years, for the sake of giving the Italian participants a chance to answer about voting in the recent Italian national elections, the overall results for political activities question might have been worse: it is simply more difficult to remember what you did in the last five years compared to the past two years.

Factual political knowledge was measured by seven factual true/false statements combined under one question (Q16 in the questionnaire). Four of the statements were identical for all the three countries (Austria, Italy, the Netherlands) and referred to issues related to the European Union's politics. Other three statements were similar by implication but, at the same time, specific for each of the countries. There were three answer options: false, true, don't know. The question was introduced by the following phrase-request: *"Please answer whether the following statements are true or false. Even if you are not sure, please still try to make your best guess. Only if you really cannot guess, mark the 'don't know' option".* In this way, if the answer option 'don't know' was marked, I assumed that a participant could not make any guess. Thus, for the purpose of measurement, the 'don't know' option for each question was equated to the wrong answer. The statements common for all the countries and the matrix for the correct answers were as follows:

Switzerland is a member of the EU	False
The European Union has 25 member states	False
Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament	False
Every six months, a different Member State becomes president of the Council of the European Union	True

The statements specific for each of the three countries and the matrix for the correct answers were:

- For Austria:

Die österreichische Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur heißt Dr. Claudia Schmied (The Austrian Federal Minister for Education, Arts and Culture is Dr. Claudia Schmied)	True
Um bei Nationalratswahlen zu kandidieren, muss man mindestens 25 Jahre alt sein (In order to stand as a candidate for national elections, a person must be at least 25 years old)	False
Der Nationalrat hat 275 Mitglieder (The National Council has 275 members)	False

- For Italy:

Il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione in Italia è Francesco Profumo (The Minister of Education in Italy is Francesco Profumo)	True
E' necessario avere almeno 25 anni per candidarsi alle elezioni nazionali in Italia (Person must be at least 25 years to stand as a candidate for national elections in Italy)	True
La Camera dei Deputati ha 945 membri (The Chamber of Deputies has 945 members)	False

- For the Netherlands:

The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science is Ronald Plasterk	False
Dutch citizens must be at least 25 years old or older if they want to participate as candidates in elections for the House of Representatives	False
The Dutch House of Representatives has 225 members	False

All the factual questions / statements were taken from the European Elections Study's 2009 questionnaire (PIREDEU, http://www.piredeu.eu/public/Voters_Quests.asp). The reasons for this decision were the following. First, these seven questions allowed the measuring of political knowledge on European Union issues, as well as on national ones. Second, the questions /statements had different degrees of difficulty. Third, they were standardized across

countries. Fourth, they were verified through the use in multiple surveys. And fifth, they were correctly translated into languages of the countries where the EES took place. All the answer options of Q16 then were combined into a 7-item scale used to measure participants' factual political knowledge, where "0" meant the lowest level of the factual political knowledge and "7" meant the highest level of the factual political knowledge.

To develop a scale measuring political competence, all the six questions-components were added together so that maximum (or correct) values for each of the questions were summated. Thus the highest score for the political competence scale in this study was '36', and the lowest one was '0'. Later, for the purpose of statistical analysis, aside from the aforementioned scale another three-levels political competence scale was composed: 'low' with the score range from 1to 12, 'medium' with the score range from 13 to 24, and 'high' with the score range from 25 to 36.

Finally, Q15 in the questionnaire, which preceded the question on factual political knowledge (Q16), asked participants to express their overall attitudes toward a set of countries, in particular: *"Below you find an alphabetical list of eleven countries. How would you express your overall opinion of each of them on the following scale from 1 to 5, where '1' means 'very unfavorable' and '5' means 'very favorable'".* The countries listed were: Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, France, Ireland, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Russia, United States, Syria. This question was not intended contributing into measuring political competence but served for control purposes, as the stimuli described a protest action in Moldova and briefly mentioned Syria (in the balanced version of the news report). Therefore, the attitudes toward these two countries should have been taken into account, for they might have affected participants' evaluation of the news reports (however, as it turned out later, these attitudes did not influence the outcome variables in any way). The formulation of the question was taken from Gallup Polls on Country Ratings, which has been used in the polls since 1980s and reads as follows: *"I'd like your overall opinion of some foreign countries. Is it very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable, or very unfavorable?"* The answer options for countries were generated by the researcher and included eleven countries in total, with the purpose of not focusing only on the two aforementioned countries. During pretesting the questionnaire, as well as during data collecting, sometimes there were individual questions as to how to consider the "overall opinion of foreign countries" without focusing on the country's particularities such as politics, economic or foreign policy, etc. Notwithstanding those individual remarks, the formulation of the question (Q15) has been kept in the original form given, first, more than thirty years of its effective usage in the Gallup Polls. Second, the

formulation of "overall opinion of a foreign country" seemed to be a quite understandable and, moreover, widespread category of an emotional, rather than a logical, estimation of a particular country, and this can be supported by the fact that the majority of participants did not have any difficulties in answering this question.*

3.6.2. Post-stimuli questions

3.6.2.1. Measures of outcome variables

The post-stimuli questions measured the outcome variables – spotting manipulated media information and accepting the standpoint(s) the manipulated message promoted. The questions were generated by the researcher based on the definition of manipulated media information used in the study, in particular, "*one-sided opinions or allegations that contain causal interpretation of the issue or problem described and assign responsibility for it, which eventually might lead a consumer of such news information to draw incorrect conclusions about the issue or problem"*.

In total, the post-stimuli section comprised nine questions. The first question (Q17 in the questionnaire) asked whether participants *"already heard, watched or read any information on the situation described in the news report above before reading it"* and had two answer options: yes/no. The intent of this question was not to check participants' integrity (how they could read about a situation that was simulated?), for they might have easily confused the country mentioned in the simulated news report with another where a similar situation might have really occurred. This question was intended to prepare participants for answering more complex questions that required some cognitive effort. Q18 (in the questionnaire) asked: *"In your personal opinion, is the subject of the news report important?"* and had four answer options: definitely yes, rather yes, rather no, definitely no. This question implied that if a participant did not consider the subject important, he or she could simply not think further as to whether the news report was manipulated or balanced and would answer further questions in a mechanical way. The next question (Q19 in the questionnaire) asked: *"Do you find the description of the situation in the news report easy to understand?"* and proposed the same four answer options as in the preceding question. I assumed that easily understandable news should have invoked more univocal evaluations.

The next question (Q20 in the questionnaire) asked: *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* and had, again, the same four answer options - definitely yes, rather yes,

*See, for example, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1624/perceptions-foreign-countries.aspx. Last time accessed on March 3, 2014.

rather no, definitely no. At first thought, this question might have seemed tricky, for no one could know for sure that a news report that described a novel subject was definitely based on facts. However, I assumed that the manipulated news report, which was one-sided and contained unsubstantiated statements, or allegations, should have, at least, implanted doubts as to the fact-basedness of the information in the minds of those participants with developed critical thinking. In this way, Q20 should have resonated to some degree with the informed media mistrust scale. The next question (Q21 in the questionnaire) asked: *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* and had the same four answer options. It measured the one-sidedness dimension of the manipulated media information definition. The next question (Q22 in the questionnaire) asked: *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* and had the same four answer options. It measured participants' ability to distinguish between the facts and unsubstantiated opinions that were presented in the news report. Question 23 (Q23 in the questionnaire) asked: *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* and, again, had the same four answer options – definitely yes, rather yes, rather no, definitely no. The next question (Q24 in the questionnaire) asked: *Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* (underlining was used in the questionnaire). It had the following four options: protesters, police, president, unclear. These two questions (Q23 and Q24) were intended to estimate (1) how well participants understood whom the news report blamed and (2) to what degree they accepted the standpoint(s) as to the assigning responsibility/blame promoted by the news report. Or, following the definition of manipulated media information, whether they accepted the causal interpretation of the issue/problem and assigned responsibility for it according to the news report's standpoint(s). The last question (Q25 in the questionnaire) asked: *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* It also had the four answer options – definitely yes, rather yes, rather no, definitely no.

All these four answer options for questions 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23 and 25 were numbered identically: namely, 'definitely yes -4', 'rather yes - 3', 'rather no - 2', 'definitely yes -1'.

The format for the answer options consisted of four possible answers and was chosen on purpose. First, I consciously avoided including any fifth, 'neutral', answer option such as 'neither... nor', 'don't know' or the like. Such options are usually very attractive for participants, for those non-committal replies give the chance of escaping any mental effort while responding to survey questions (for a general discussion, see Mondak, 2000; Mondak & Canache, 2004). Thus, the inclusion of that option in the measures of the outcome variables might have led to the situation where a significant number of answers might have been

marked with not particularly helpful 'neutral' answers. For this reason, those options used in the questionnaire stimulated participants to think about the news report they read and give their opinions on it. Nevertheless, the significant number of people who comprised the study samples in each of the three countries and the randomized assignment to conditions served as a warranty, that on average, the answers should have been reliable. Second, the proposed answer options still allowed for the expression of different degrees of confidence when evaluating news reports. This, in turn, made it possible to construct the Likert-type scale for estimating possible linear relationships between the variables. Third, the four answer options enabled the creation of a binomial variable for measuring the mere fact of spotting. The logic behind this was as follows: a person either spotted manipulated information or he/she did not spot it.

Therefore, of the nine post-stimuli questions described, four (namely, Q20, Q21, Q22 and Q25) were combined into scales - ordinal and binomial ones to measure the spotting of manipulated information. To create the ordinal scale, all four questions were simply summed up. The scale reliability check showed that for Austrian sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.76, for the Italian sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.79 and for the Dutch sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.68 which is ≈ 0.70. For the total combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.78. To create a categorical variable, first, I added together the 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes' answers to compose one 'yes' dimension, and the 'definitely no' and 'rather no' answers to compose one 'no' dimension. Then all the four questions were also summed up. As a result, I obtained the variable with two categorical values that were recoded in such a way as to denote '1 - spotting' and '0 - non-spotting'.

Also, by the same token, using the same procedures, two other scales - ordinal and binomial - were created, which consisted this time of three questions, Q21, Q22 and Q25. This was done with the purpose of checking and the potential refining of results of the measurements made with the foregoing 4-items scales that included the question about the news reports fact-basedness. Despite, as explained above, the fact that it was considered entirely motivated and relevant to include this indirect measure into the 4-items scales of spotting manipulated media information, I still decided, by creating the 3-items scales consisting of direct measures for spotting one-sidedness and allegation-loadedness, to look at whether there was any difference in results between the two types of scale. The scale reliability check showed that for the Austrian sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.70, for the Italian sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.77 and for the Dutch sample the Cronbach's alpha

was 0.62; for the total combined Austrian-Italian-Dutch sample the Cronbach's alpha was 0.74.

Question 24 measured the second outcome variable - accepting the news report standpoint(s). It asked participants on whom they personally placed responsibility for the situations described in the news message. For the purpose of statistical analysis, the answer options were later numbered as follows: 'protesters - 1', 'police - 2', 'president - 3', 'unclear - 4'. In addition, participants were allowed to choose multiple response options, not just one of them. It was expected that, if participants who read the manipulated news report chose such answer options as 'police' or 'president' or both, then they fully accepted the report standpoints. However if they chose 'protesters' (which, in fact, has almost never been the case) or, especially, 'unclear', this required the conducting of further correlation tests with Q23 and 4-items (3-items) scales for a subsequent interpretation. In turn, if those who read the balanced news report chose such answer options as 'protesters', "police' or 'president' or any combination of them, all these choices would be regarded as correct. Yet, if they chose 'unclear', this again required the conducting of further correlation tests with Q23 and 4-items (3-items) scales for a subsequent interpretation. Tentatively, the following interpretations were anticipated:

- if participants were unable to spot manipulation in the manipulated news report ('yes' answers predominated), the answer option 'unclear' might have meant they were unable to make a choice between the police and the president as to who was blamed for the death in that news report;
- if the participants were able to spot manipulation in the manipulated news report ('no' answers predominated), the answer option 'unclear' may have meant that the news report was not trusted, so it was impossible to place responsibility on someone;
- if the participants read the balanced news report which contained two opposite points of view on the situation described, the answer option 'unclear' may have meant that it was impossible to decide who was responsible based on this news report only and without getting additional information on the issue.

Given that participants could choose multiple response options in Q24, which eventually made participants' lives easier but statistical analysis harder, and, in particular, for the manipulated type of the news report, a categorical variable for this question was subsequently created. After data were collected, summarized and prepared for further

analysis, the following variants of responses became apparent: 'police', 'president', 'police and president', 'unclear', 'protesters', 'protesters and police', 'all'. As the manipulated news report standpoints indicated that the police or president or both should have been blamed, these options were combined under the value of '1 - 'accepting standpoint', and the others under the value of '0 - non-accepting standpoint'.

3.6.2.2. Demographic questions

The questionnaire ended with six questions that measured participants' demographic data: age, gender, academic status (1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year, Master's, PhD student, other (to be specified), department, major or specialization, and citizenship.

Participants' ages were measured by an open-ended question that asked "What is your age?". Subsequently, for the purpose of statistical tests, the study samples were subdivided into several age categories (see section *Participants* for demographic data). The question on the university department affiliation of the study participants was aimed at measuring the number of those who studied political science. The reason was that such persons might have shown higher levels of political competence, either due to their class assignments or because they took an interest in political matters, for all intents and purposes. Therefore, comparison of participants from different university departments with regard to their levels of political competence and its influence on the outcome variables was needed (see section *Participants* for demographic data). The question about participants' citizenship was absolutely crucial for the study. First, this question allowed for identifying the number of participants from a particular country. Those who indicated a citizenship other than of the country where the study was conducted or pointed to dual citizenship were excluded from further statistical analysis. Second, the answer options for the citizenship question, where '1' denoted Austria, '2' stood for the Netherlands and '3' marked Italy, served as labels for respective countries and, in this way, corresponded to those countries' media literacy ranks. In other words, the aforementioned answer options were employed in assessing the quality of the second explanatory variable, media literacy context.

At the close of the questionnaire, I thanked participants in writing for their efforts and invited their comments.

All the three questionnaires can be found in Appendix A.

3.7. The questionnaires / news reports randomization procedure

The questionnaires were absolutely identical except for the news reports that were included, of which there were two versions, manipulated and balanced, each of which, in turn, was claimed to have been taken either from traditional or from alternative Internet news sources. To ensure random allocation of participants to one of the news reports, they needed to be stacked and then handed out in random order. To provide for that randomization, the questionnaires were stacked with the help of the online random numbers generator from http://stattrek.com/tables/random.aspx. In other words, for example, having 400 questionnaires, 100 per each of the four conditions ('traditional-balanced', 'traditional-manipulated, 'alternative-balanced', 'alternative-manipulated'), I set the value of random numbers at '400', with the minimum value of '1' and the maximum value of '400', not allowing duplicated entries. As a result, I stacked the questionnaires in the set order I got from the random numbers generator. I kept them in that order, then took the questionnaires to a classroom where the study took place and, finally, handed them out again in the same order to the study participants.

3.8. The study procedure

My choice of the universities in Austria, Italy and the Netherlands where I carried out the experimental sessions has not been random but made empirically by contacting universities and getting either favorable or unfavorable responses from them as to the possibility of conducting my study there. The specific arrangements for carrying out the experimental sessions in the classroom settings were made directly with professors teaching classes well before the intended dates of the experiments - from three to six months. In the first place, I contacted professors in different departments of a particular university with a short letter of request for help in conducting my study in their classes by employing their students as the study participants. I explained in brief my background and what my research was about. Also, I noted that, if necessary, I was ready to provide additional detailed information on my study as well as a letter of support from my supervisor, Professor Alexander Trechsel. Some professors asked me to send them the questionnaire I was going to use in the experiment. I sent it along with the added caution that they were not to reveal the overall intent of the research and the questions used in it to anyone, and especially to prospective study participants. Finally, in my letters I suggested the possibility of giving a kind of a class extra-credit to students who would agree to participate in the study.* The total

* However, I do not know whether any extra-credits were proposed or given by the professors to participants.

time I needed for making final arrangements in each country was four months for Austria, three months for Italy and six months for the Netherlands.

The experimental sessions were carried out in March 2012 in Austria (University of Vienna), in May-June 2012 in Italy (University of Florence), and in October 2012 in the Netherlands (Leiden University). The number of participants in each class (virtually referred to as a 'group') was not equal. In Austria, one group consisted of about 120 participants, and other groups included from 25 to 35 persons. In Italy, the number of people in each experimental session ranged from 20 to 40 persons. In the Netherlands, I had the largest scatter as to the quantity of participants in groups - from 10 to 100 persons. The sessions of the experiment were conducted in the classrooms where the students had their classes, at the beginning of the class, and took from about 12 to 20 for all tasks to be completed by all the participants.

At the beginning of each of the sessions, I was introduced to the students by the professor who taught that particular class and who had kindly allowed me make use of her/his class for my study.

Then I told the students in brief about myself and what I was asking them to do. Each time I spoke English. In Italy, my introductory speech was immediately interpreted into Italian by the professor who taught the class. In Austria, I used a PowerPoint presentation in German that word-for-word repeated what I was saying in English. The PPT presentation had been earlier checked by native speakers – by a German language teacher of the Language Center of the European University Institute and, later for the purpose of cross-checking, by one of professors of the University of Vienna. In the Netherlands, I spoke in English but each time asked whether everything was clear or if an interpretation into Dutch would be preferable (the professors or their teaching assistants were ready to assist). I asked this again after the Dutch participants had completed the questionnaires.*

My introductory speech was as follows:

"My name is Vasyl Kucherenko. I am a researcher from European University Institute which is in Florence, Italy. I am carrying out comparative research in several European countries. The purpose of the research is to explore how various popular Internet news sources - traditional (that is, websites of newspapers, TVs, news agencies etc.) and alternative

* The remarkable fact was that no one ever said that something had been incomprehensible or ambiguous for them. In response to my specification as to whether they thought that the Dutch language would have better fitted the questionnaire and news reports than the English language, there were never any positive responses favoring Dutch

(that is, blogs, various social networks) - cover foreign news, and to what degree, if at all, different types of such foreign news coverage catch (attract) attention of people of different ages. I am asking you to participate in this research, and I would really appreciate if you agree to take part in it.

You will complete a questionnaire asking about your use of various news media, general attitudes toward news media, and your political and social activity. Then, you will read a short piece of news taken from one of the popular Internet news sources in your country.

In order to avoid identifying the source through any of its characteristics - web pages, logo, font etc. - only the text of the news report is reprinted here in a standard computer font. Finally, you will answer questions asking about your attitudes toward that news report.

The study will take approximately 15 minutes to complete, even less. Of course, your participation in the study is voluntary and you can decline participating or stop participating at any time. However, your participation and accurate answers to the questions are very important for this research project and for the science, and I would be very grateful to you if you complete the questionnaire. Finally, I would like to assure you that all your answers are anonymous, no one will be able to identify you from your answers, and all research records will be kept private.

I thank you for your participation, for your efforts in advance. Now I will hand the questionnaires out… Now let's start and, please, work independently!"

While the students were completing the survey, I kept a check on them to ensure that they were not talking to each other. If that was the case, as, for example, in Italy, I asked them to work independently. There were no such situations in Austria and only rare ones in the Netherlands.

At the end of each of the experimental sessions, after participants had completed and returned the questionnaires, they were debriefed. In particular, I told them the following:

"I thank you very much again for your participation. Now I must tell you that news messages in this study were simulated, that is, not real, for the study purposes. Thus, please do not believe in everything you have just read. Finally, I want to ask you not to tell your friends, colleagues, other students about the specifics of this study, as those students might be the next participants in the study and, for this reason, they shouldn't know about the details of the research beforehand."

As the participation in the study was proclaimed to be voluntary, there were several

individual cases where students withdrew from the participation. However, the total number of such cases amounted to less than ten.

In the next chapter I will present the results of the statistical tests of my hypotheses and exploratory questions. The bulk of the chapter will focus on the results pertaining to the participants of the three countries in the target age category of 18-26 years. In the rest of the chapter the key results for the three age groups of the Italian sample will be presented.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

This chapter consists of two parts. *Part 1*focuses on a comparison of the Dutch, Austrian and Italian participants in the study target age category of 18-26 years old. Here, the test results of hypotheses and exploratory questions are preceded by general descriptive data with respect to explanatory and outcome variables. More statistics pertaining to the participants in this age category can be found in Appendix C. *Part 2* encompasses a closer look at Italian participants in all the three age categories: 18-26 years old, 27-35 years old, and 36≤ years old. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, the total number of these participants was 394, which allowed for exploring the possible effects of age on levels of political competence as well as its role in spotting manipulated media information and accepting / rejecting the standpoint(s) the information promotes. Besides, some other key points were compared across the three age categories of the Italian sample - in particular, levels of informed media mistrust and the trustworthiness of the Internet news sources. Again, only principal statistical results on the Italian sample are demonstrated in this chapter. Additional statistics are contained in Appendix D.

PART 1. The Dutch, Austrian and Italian samples in the age category of 18-26 years old

4.1. Explanatory variables

4.1.1 First (main) explanatory variable - Political Competence

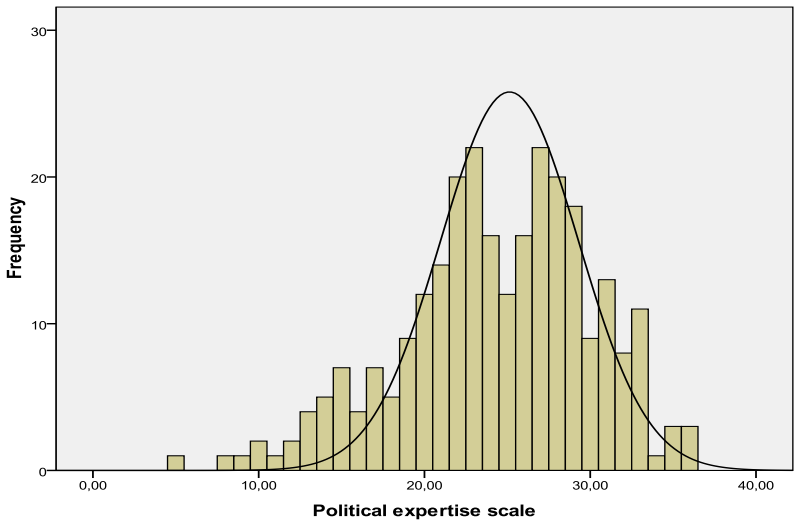
The *political competence* scale, the main explanatory variable in the study, had the lowest possible value of '0' and the highest possible value of '36'. The summary statistics by country are shown below in Table 14 and Figure 5.

Table 14. Summary statistics for *political competence scale* (by country)

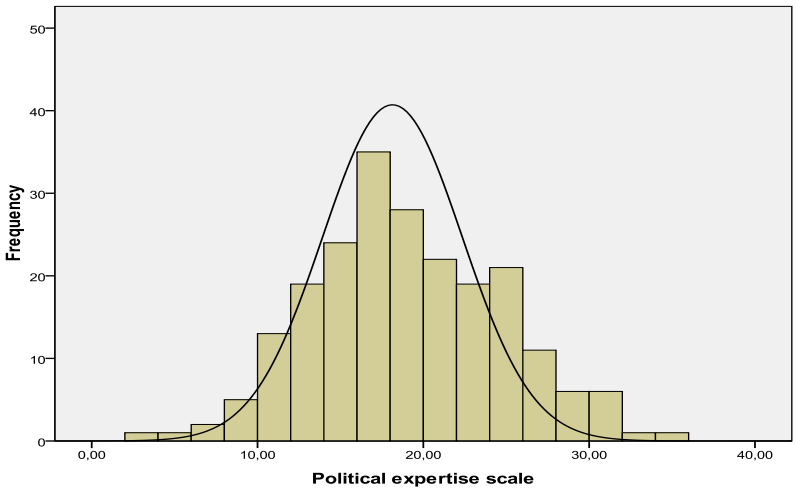
Summary statistics	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
N Valid	265	215	221
Missing	5	10	16
Mean	24,3	18,5	17,1
Median	25,0	18,0	17,0
Standard deviation	5,8	5,6	5,9
Range	31	32	31
Minimum	5	3	1
Maximum	36	35	32
TOTAL, N	**274**	**225**	**237**

Figure 5. Histograms for *political competence scale* (by country)

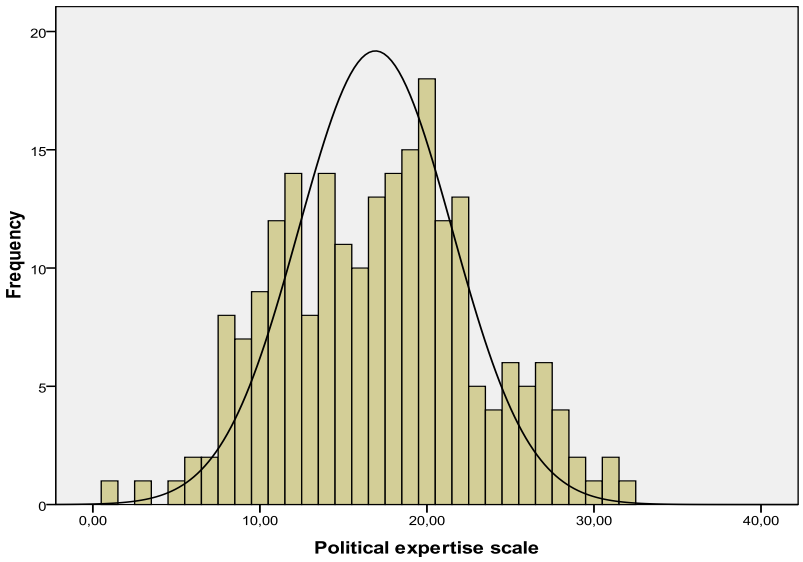
THE NETHERLANDS



AUSTRIA



ITALY



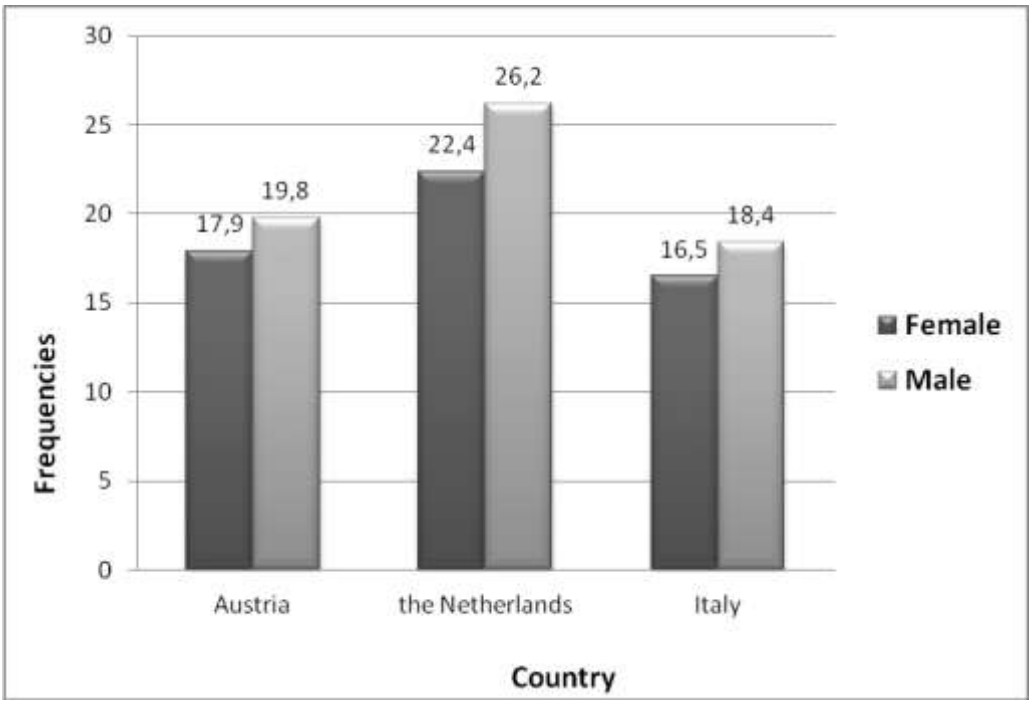
Analysis of missing values and outliers in each of the three samples revealed that they did not have any significant effect on the overall picture regarding the distribution of *political competence scale* values across the samples. Further details of the analysis are provided in Appendix C.

Further comparisons made within each sample by gender revealed that males generally scored higher on the *political competence scale* than females (Table 15 & Figure 6).

Table 15. Summary statistics by gender for *political competence scale* (by country)

Summary statistics	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	Female	***Male***	***Female***	***Male***	***Female***	***Male***
N Valid	133	136	145	70	148	73
Missing	3	2	6	4	8	8
Mean	22,4	26,2	17,9	19,8	16,5	18,4
Median	23	27	18,0	19,0	16,5	19,0
Standard deviation	5,5	5,4	5,8	5,0	5,7	6,2
Range	25	31	32	21	31	25
Minimum	8	5	3	11	1	6
Maximum	33	36	35	32	32	31
TOTAL, N	**136**	**138**	**151**	**74**	**156**	**81**

Figure 6. Mean values for *political competence scale* by gender (by country)



Correlations calculated between components of the *political competence* scale for each of the three samples were all positive but differed in their strength from sample to sample. However, what is typical of each of the three samples is that the strongest correlations exist between 'interest in politics', on the one side, and 'days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media' and 'participating in political discussions in a typical

week', on the other side; as well as between 'days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media' and 'participating in political discussions in a typical week'. Also, strong correlations were noted in the Dutch and Italian samples between participants' intentions to vote in national and local elections (for details see Appendix C). In addition to the scale components correlations, I compared the components' summary statistics between the three samples (except for the two categorical 'intentions to vote' questions). The results are shown in Table 16 below.

Table 16. Summary statistics for *political competence scale* components (by country)

Components-questions	**Netherlands (*N* = 269)**	**Austria (*N* = 215)**	**Italy (*N* = 221)**
To what extent you are interested in politics *(Min=1, Max=4*)	*X* = 3,6 Md = 4,0 SD = 0,6	*X* = 2,5 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,8	*X* = 2,3 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,7
Days in a typical week intentionally get political information from news media *(Min=0, Max=7*)	*X* = 5,4 Md = 6,0 SD = 1,8	*X* = 4,1 Md = 4,0 SD = 2,0	*X* = 3,9 Md = 4,0 SD = 2,1
Participating in political discussions in a typical week *(Min=0, Max=5*)	*X* = 3,2 Md = 3,0 SD = 1,3	*X* = 1,7 Md = 2 SD = 1,1	*X* = 1,6 Md = 1,0 SD = 1,2
Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions *(Min=0, Max=3*)	*X* = 1,9 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,7	*X* = 1,3 Md = 1,0 SD = 0,7	*X* = 1,4 Md = 1,0 SD = 0,9
Factual political knowledge scale *(Min=0, Max=7*)	*X* = 4,7 Md = 5,0 SD = 1,6	*X* = 3,8 Md = 4,0 SD = 1,5	*X* = 3,2 Md = 3,0 SD = 1,6
Political activity scale *(Min=0, Max=10*)	*X* = 3,6 Md = 3,0 SD = 1,9	*X* = 3,2 Md = 3,0 SD = 1,5	*X* = 3,2 Md = 3,0 SD = 1,7

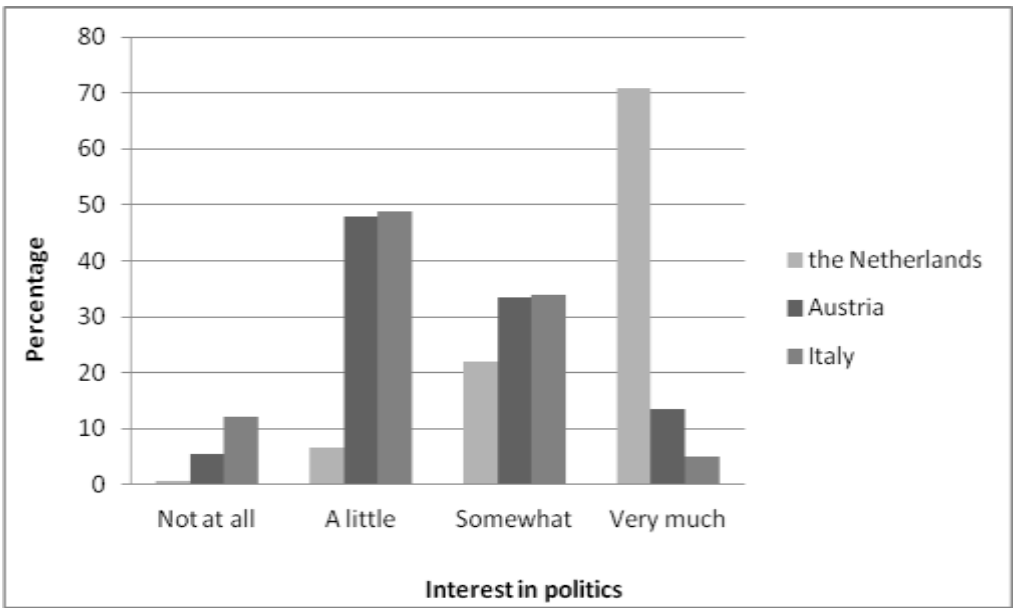
Again, the Dutch participants took the lead in every component of the *political competence scale* followed by the Austrian and Italians, whose summary scores were sometimes very close to each other. To gain better insight into score distributions within each component of the *political competence scale* and, thus, make comparison between samples more visible, I calculated frequencies for the components (shown in Tables 17 - 24 and Figures 7 - 13 below). Although the Dutch participants outnumbered their Austrian and Italian counterparts (that in number are almost equal to one another), which led to a somewhat higher percentage for the Dutch displayed in the tables and diagrams, the overall tendency is still clear.

Thus, with regard to a degree of interest in politics, the Austrians and Italians virtually match as to percentage of those interested 'a little' and 'somewhat' - 48% vs. 49% and 33.5% vs. 34%, correspondingly. However, nearly twice as many of the Italian participants were not interested in politics at all as compared to their Austrian counterparts and vice versa - the Austrians who were very much interested more than twice outnumbered the Italians. The Dutch take a dominant lead with 71% of participants who said that they were very much interested (Table 17 & Figure 7).

Table 17. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"To what extent would you say you are interested in politics"* (by country)

Interest in politics	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
Not at all	*0,7*	*5,4*	*12,2*
A little	*6,6*	*47,8*	*48,9*
Somewhat	*21,9*	*33,5*	*33,8*
Very much	*70,8*	*13,4*	*5,1*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 7. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"To what extent would you say you are interested in politics"* (by country)

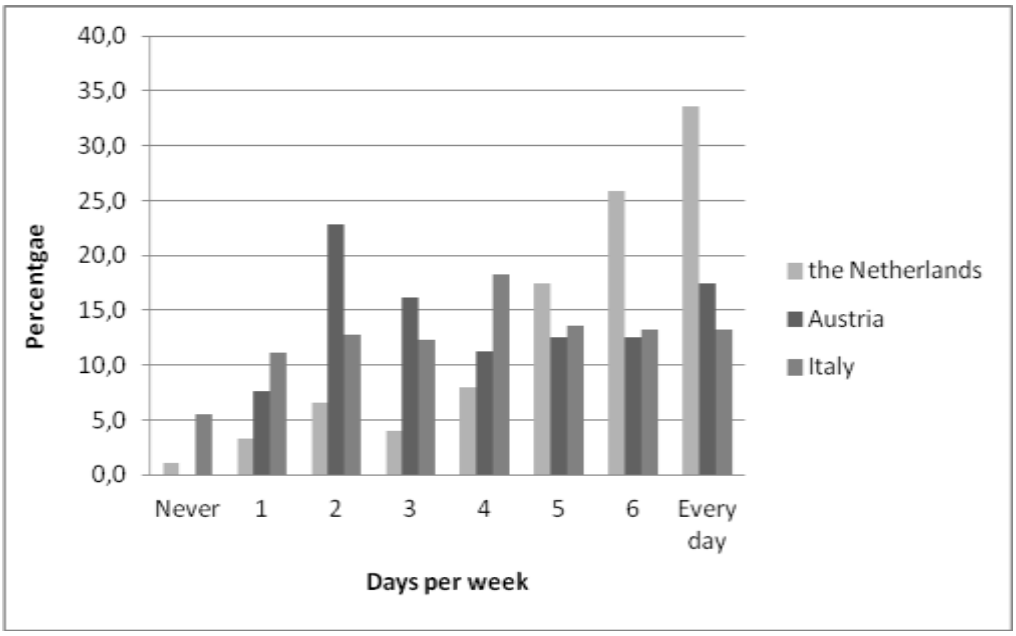


In respect of intentionally getting political information from news media, the Dutch again stood first: 77% of participants reported consuming political news from 5 to 7 days per week as compared to 42,4% of the Austrians and 40% of the Italians (Table 18 & Figure 8).

Table 18. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"How many days in a typical week you intentionally watch, listen to, or read political information from news media"* (by country)

Days per week	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
Never	*1,1*	-	*5,5*
1	*3,3*	*7,6*	*11,1*
2	*6,6*	*22,8*	*12,8*
3	*4,0*	*16,1*	*12,3*
4	*8,0*	*11,2*	*18,3*
5	*17,5*	*12,5*	*13,6*
6	*25,9*	*12,5*	*13,2*
Every day	*33,6*	*17,4*	*13,2*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 8. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"How many days in a typical week you intentionally watch, listen to, or read political information from news media"* (by country)

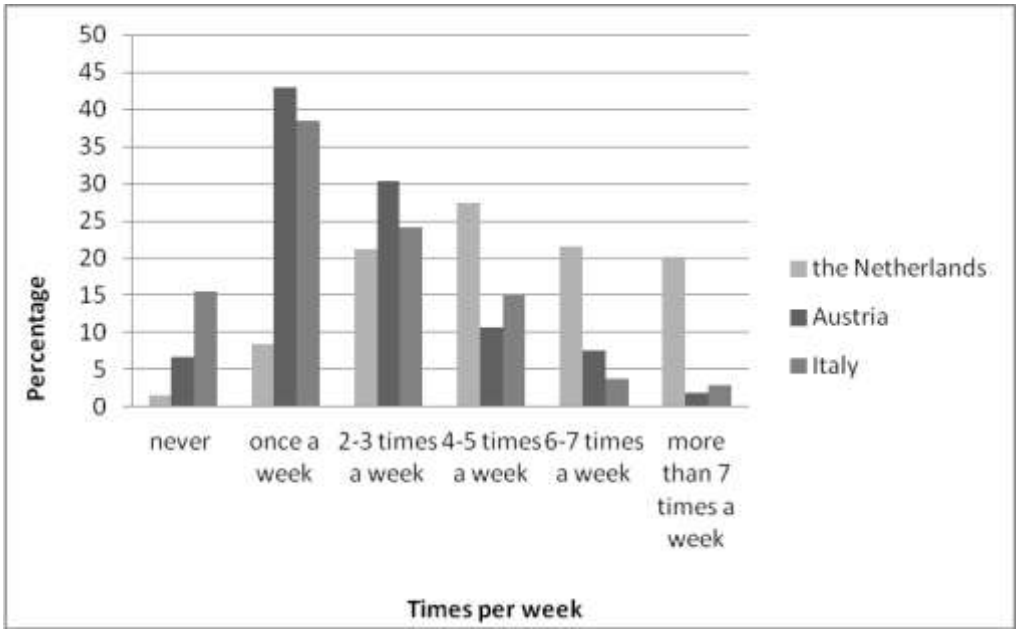


A majority of the Austrian and Italian participants discussed politics from 1 to 3 times in a week (73.3% and 62.5%, respectively), while the majority of the Dutch participants - 69% - involved themselves in political discussions from 4 to more than 7 times a week. Moreover, 20% of the Dutch discussed political issues more than 7 times a week as compared to 2% of the Austrians and 3% of the Italians (Table 19 & Figure 9).

Table 19. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"How often do you discuss political issues with other people in a typical week"* (by country)

Political discussions per week	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
Never	*1,5*	*6,7*	*15,6*
Once a week	*8,4*	*42,9*	*38,4*
2-3 times a week	*21,2*	*30,4*	*24,1*
4-5 times a week	*27,4*	*10,7*	*15,2*
6-7 times a week	*21,5*	*7,6*	*3,8*
More than 7 times a week	*20,1*	*1,8*	*3,0*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 9. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"How often do you discuss political issues with other people in a typical week"* (by country)

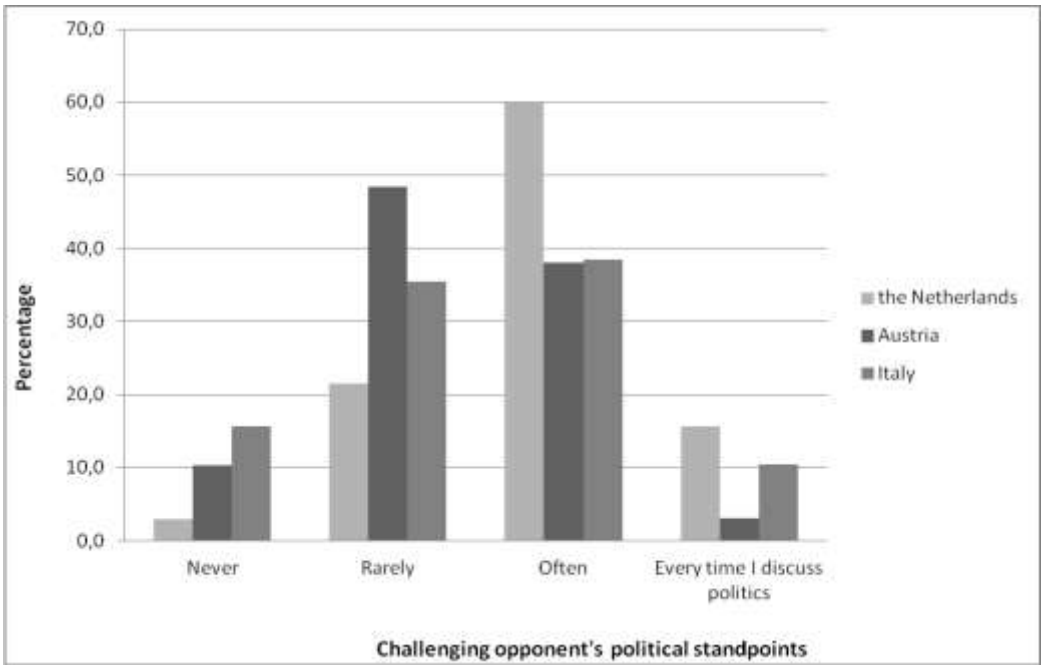


In addition, only about 3% of the Dutch participants reported they never challenged the standpoints of their opponents in political discussions, while 10.3% of the Austrians and 15.6% of the Italians stated the same. Conversely, 15.7% of the Dutch declared they challenge the opponent's standpoints every time they discuss politics as compared to 3.1% of the Austrians and 10.5% of the Italians (Table 20 & Figure 10).

Table 20. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"During political discussions, how often do you try to challenge the standpoints of your opponent by arguing your case"* (by country)

Challenging opponent's standpoints during political discussions	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
Never	*2,9*	*10,3*	*15,6*
Rarely	*21,5*	*48,4*	*35,4*
Often	*59,9*	*38,1*	*38,4*
Every time I discuss politics	*15,7*	*3,1*	*10,5*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 10. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"During political discussions, how often do you try to challenge the standpoints of your opponent by arguing your case"* (by country)

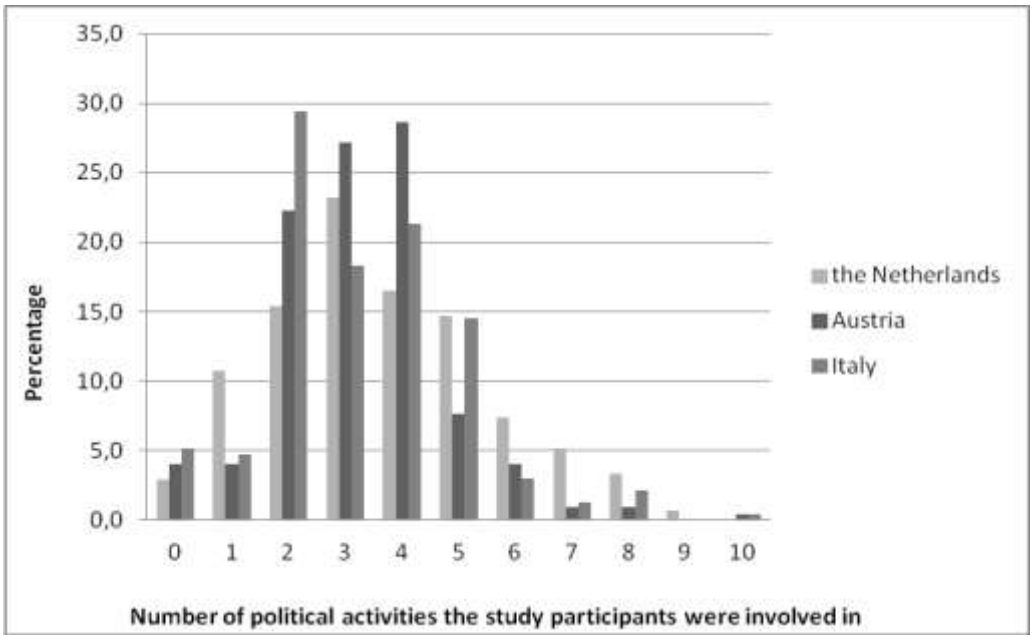


Among the types of political activity, voting in national and local elections gained the highest percentage of responses in all samples, followed by signing a petition (the Austrians and the Dutch), and participating in a march, demonstration or protest (the Austrians and the Italians) (Table 21 & Figure 11).

Table 21. Percent distribution of positive answers to questions on political participation (by particular questions, by country)

Activity: In past 2 years, have you…	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
ever written a letter to a newspaper on a political issue	*6,6*	*4,5*	*3,4*
joined a political organization	*25,2*	*4,5*	*5,5*
already been a member of a political organization	*17,9*	*4,9*	*6,3*
ever written a letter to a politician or official	*14,2*	*8.9*	*3,8*
ever signed a petition on a political issue	*64,2*	*58,9*	*35,0*
ever participated in a march, demonstration, or protest	*31,4*	*55,8*	*49,2*
voted in the recent national elections	*93,1*	*89,3*	*81,9*
attended any political meetings or rallies	*43,1*	*11,2*	*41,8*
voted in the recent local elections	*58,0*	*84,4*	*84,3*
ever campaigned for a candidate/political party	*10,2*	*2,2*	*12,2*

Figure 11. Percent distribution of positive answers to questions on political participation (by number of political activities, by country)

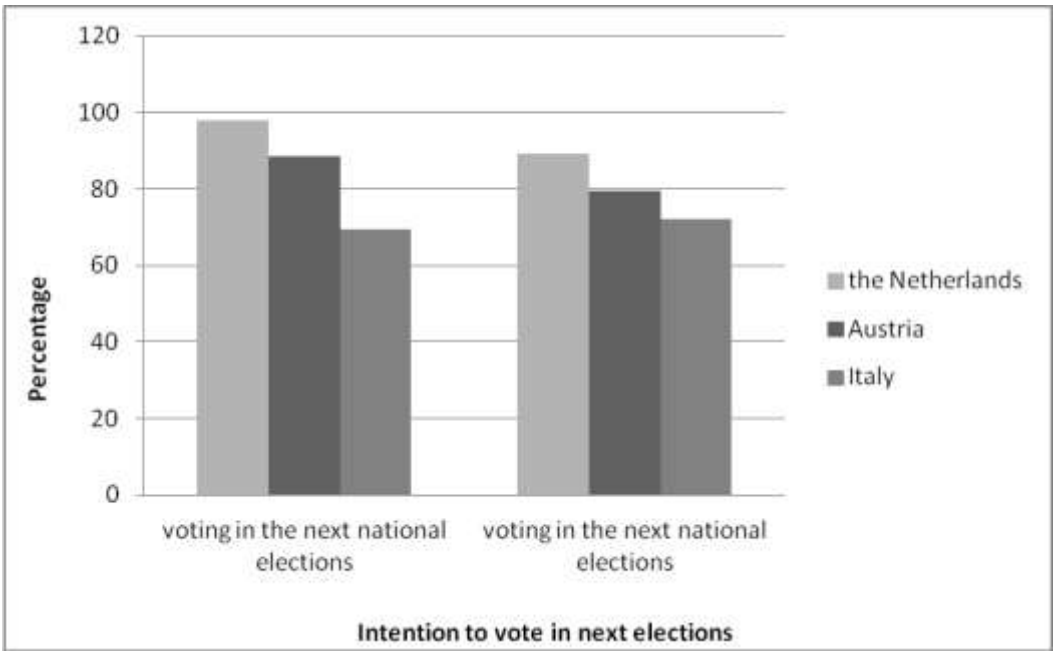


Among the three samples, the Italian participants least intended to vote in the next national and local elections, followed by the Austrians (Table 22 & Figure 12).

Table 22. Percent distribution of positive answers to questions on intentions to vote in the next national and local elections (by country)

Intention to vote...	the Netherlands	Austria	Italy
in the next national elections	*97,8*	*88,4*	*69,6*
in the next local elections	*89,3*	*79,4*	*72,3*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 12. Percent distribution of positive answers to questions on intentions to vote in the next national and local elections (by country)



The factual political knowledge questions comprised four questions conditionally referred to as 'external' - about facts relating European Union politics - and three questions conditionally referred to as 'internal' - about political facts of the country that the sample was drawn from. The results in Table 23 demonstrate that, in general, there is not much difference between answers to questions on 'external' and 'internal' politics given by the Dutch and Italian participants. However, the Austrian participants showed a higher knowledge of the facts relating to European Union politics compared to the facts of their domestic politics.

Table 23. Percent distribution of correct answers to factual political knowledge questions (by country)

Questions	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
Switzerland is a Member of the EU	*86,9*	*92,0*	*67,9*
The EU has 25 Member States	*61,7*	*58,6*	*42,9*
Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament	*62,0*	*64,9*	*52,6*
Every six months a different Member State becomes President of the Council of the EU	*53,8*	*55,1*	*20,3*
The Austrian Minister of Education, Art and Culture is Dr. Claudia Schmied The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science is Ronald Plasterk The Italian Minister of Education is Francesco Profumo	*73,0*	*61,4*	*40,3*
To stand as a candidate for the Austrian National Council, a person must be at least 25 years old Dutch citizens must be at least 25 years or older if they wish to participate as candidates in elections to the House of Representatives To stand as a candidate for national elections in Italy, a person must be at least 25 years old	*71,5*	*30,8*	*53,4*
The National Council in Austria has 275 members The House of Representatives of the Netherlands has 225 members The Chamber of Deputies in Italy has 945 members	*64,2*	*20,4*	*41,1*

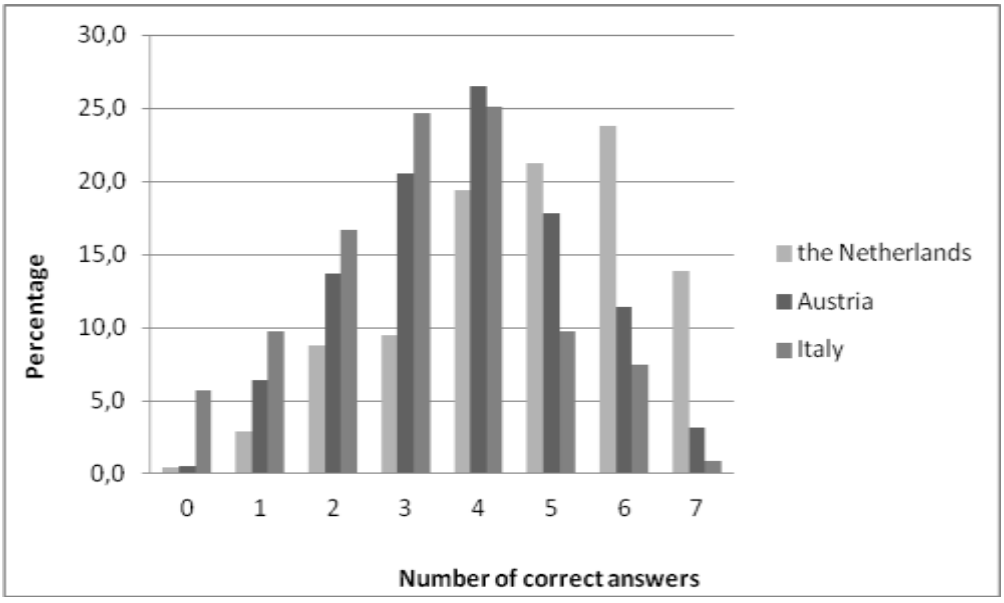
A comparison of the total number of correct answers to the factual political knowledge questions showed that the Dutch were generally more politically knowledgeable followed by the Austrians and then the Italians. Thus, 13.9% of the Dutch participants (or 38 persons) answered all the seven factual questions and 23.8% (or 65 persons) answered six questions, while only 3.2% of the Austrian participants (or 7 persons) and 0.9% of the Italian participants (or 2 persons) answered seven questions, and 11.4% of the Austrians (or 25 persons) and 7.5% of the Italians (or 17 persons) answered six questions. At the same time, there were 0.4% (or 1 person) of those who did not answer any of the questions and 2.9% (or 8 persons) of those who answered only one question among the Dutch participants as compared to 0.5% (or 1 person) and 6.4% (or 14 persons) of the Austrians and 5.7% (or 13

persons) and 9.7% (or 22 persons) of the Italians, respectively. The results are shown in Table 24 and Figure 13).

Table 24. **Percent distribution of a total number of correct answers to factual political knowledge questions (by country)**

Total number of questions answered correctly	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
0	*0,4*	*0,5*	*5,7*
1	*2,9*	*6,4*	*9,7*
2	*8,8*	*13,7*	*16,7*
3	*9,5*	*20,5*	*24,7*
4	*19,4*	*26,5*	*25,1*
5	*21,2*	*17,8*	*9,7*
6	*23,8*	*11,4*	*7,5*
7	*3,9*	*3,2*	*0.9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 13. Percent distribution of total number of correct answers to factual political knowledge questions (by country)



4.1.2. Second explanatory variable - Media Literacy Context

As it was already stated in the previous chapter 'Research Design and Methods', the second explanatory variable resulted from the Member States media literacy ranking. According to this, the three countries selected for the study differ in their ranks as follows: the Netherlands possesses the advanced level of media literacy, Austria has a medium-high level and is ranked above European average, and Italy with its medium-low level is ranked below European average (see Table 9 in Chapter III for exact numbers).

4.2. Outcome variables (*and questions inextricably associated with them)*

Of nine post-stimuli questions (all but those of demographics), five were used to measure the two outcome variables - spotting manipulated media information and accepting its standpoint. Of the rest of the four questions, one, which asked whether participants had already heard, watched or read any information on the situation described in the news report, played an 'opening' part after reading the news report and before participants answered questions that measured their opinions of it. The other three - which asked whether participants viewed the subject of the news report as important, the description of the situation in the news report as easily understandable, and whether it was clear for them from the news report who was responsible for the death of protesters - served as 'control' questions. Given that there are four conditions in the study, according to the two types and two subtypes of the news reports - 'balanced traditional', 'balanced alternative', 'manipulated traditional', 'manipulated alternative' - separate post-stimuli questions and scales were initially measured in correspondence with the conditions. However, if the difference between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the news reports was negligible, only 'manipulated' and 'balanced' types were reported in Tables and Figures.

4.2.1. Measuring the importance of the topic of the news reports and their understandability

There were no considerable discrepancies between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the news reports as regards the 'importance' question. For this reason, the subtypes were combined, and the results are reported for 'balanced' and 'manipulated' types. The subject of the 'balanced' news report was considered more or less important by a majority of the Austrian (58.4%) and Dutch (65.9%) participants and by the overwhelming majority of the

Italian ones (88.6%). At the same time, the topic of the manipulated news was regarded as important to one degree or another by the large majority of participants of all the three samples - 94.9% of the Austrians, 88.8% of the Dutch, and 98.2% of the Italians. For detailed numbers of percent distribution, please see Appendix C.

With regard to the understandability of the situation described in the news reports, there were also no considerable discrepancies between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the news reports. For this reason, the subtypes were combined, and the results are reported for 'balanced' and 'manipulated' types. The large majority of participants in all the three samples considered the situations described in both types of the news reports easy to understand.

Taking into account the fact that either the majority or the overwhelming majority of the participants regarded the subject of the news reports as important and the description of the situation as easily understandable, most notably in respect to the manipulated type of the news report, I assumed that subsequent participants' answers were not given due to reasons such as considering the subject matter of the news as not at all valuable or misunderstanding the circumstances described in the reports.

4.2.2. First outcome variable - Spotting Manipulated Media Information

A. Questions measured spotting manipulated information

Fact-basedness, balance, allegation-loadedness of the news reports and overall trust in it were measured by original questions with four ordinal response options: 'definitely no', rather no', rather yes', 'definitely yes'. Then these response options were recoded so that to take the form of the binary response options 'yes/no' (as was explained in the previous chapter, 'definitely no' and 'rather no' were summed up as well as 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes'). Here are shown percent distributions of responses to the recoded questions measured spotting manipulated information. Information on percent distribution of responses to the original questions, with four ordinal response options, measured spotting manipulated information can be found in Appendix C.

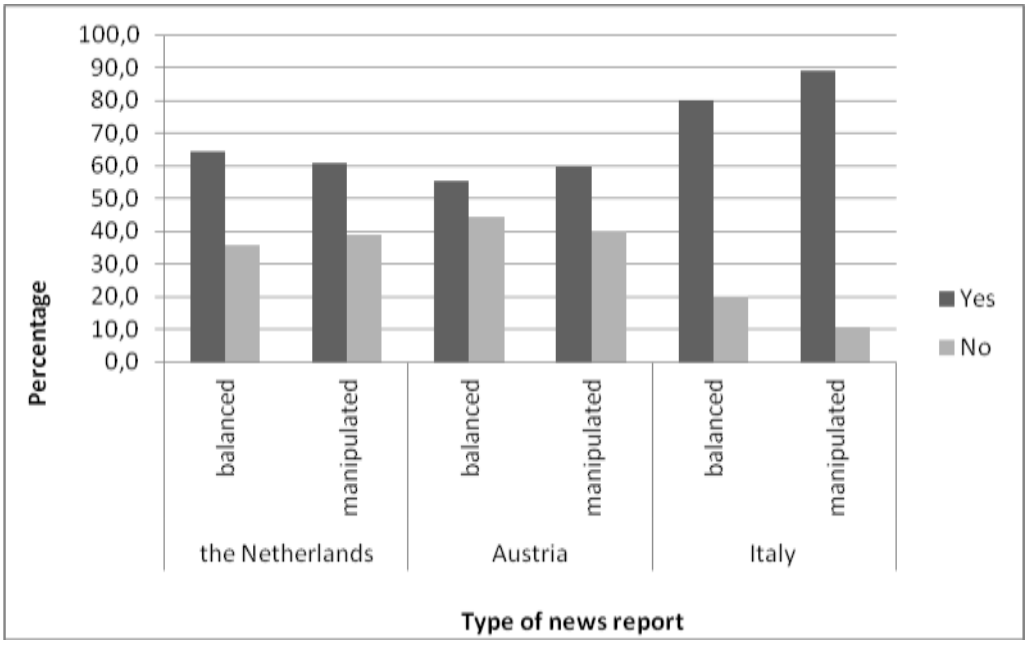
1) Responses to the question about 'fact-basedness' contained no considerable discrepancies between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the news reports. For this reason, the subtypes were combined, and results are reported for 'balanced' and 'manipulated' types. As Tables 25 as well as Figures 14 show, the majority of participants in all the three samples considered both the balanced and manipulated news reports as fact-based. In addition, the large majority of the Italian participants advanced such opinions, followed by the

Dutch and, finally, the Austrian participants.

Table 25. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*64,4*	*61,0*	*55,5*	*59,8*	*79,9*	*89,2*
No	*35,6*	*39,0*	*44,5*	*40,2*	*20,1*	*10,8*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 14. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)



Additional information on percent distribution of responses to this question can be found in Appendix C.

2) Responses to the question about 'balance' had no considerable discrepancies between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the balanced version of the news report, except for the

Italian participants, but they differed according to the subtypes within the manipulated version. As is seen from Table 26, a roughly equal number of the Austrian and the Dutch participants regarded both subtypes of the balanced news report as balanced or unbalanced, whereas among the Italian participants more persons judged the 'alternative' subtype (that is, allegedly taken from alternative Internet news sources) as less balanced compared to the 'traditional' one (that is, allegedly taken from traditional Internet news sources) - 40.3% vs. 28.4%, respectively.

Table 26. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Yes	*61,1*	*61,9*	*39,7*	*40,0*	*71,7*	*59,6*
No	*38,8*	*38,1*	*60,3*	*60,0*	*28,4*	*40,4*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

In respect to the manipulated version of the news report, the majority of the Austrian and Dutch participants viewed both of its subtypes as 'not balanced', while the Italians held the opposite opinion. In addition, as Tables 27 show, there was a considerable difference between perception of the two subtypes of the news report: a higher number of Austrians and Italians regarded the 'alternative' subtype as more unbalanced, whereas the Dutch judged the 'traditional' subtype as so.

Table 27. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Yes	*35,8*	*40,5*	*40,4*	*25,0*	*72,5*	*63,4*
No	*64,2*	*59,4*	*59,6*	*75,0*	*27,5*	*36,4*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

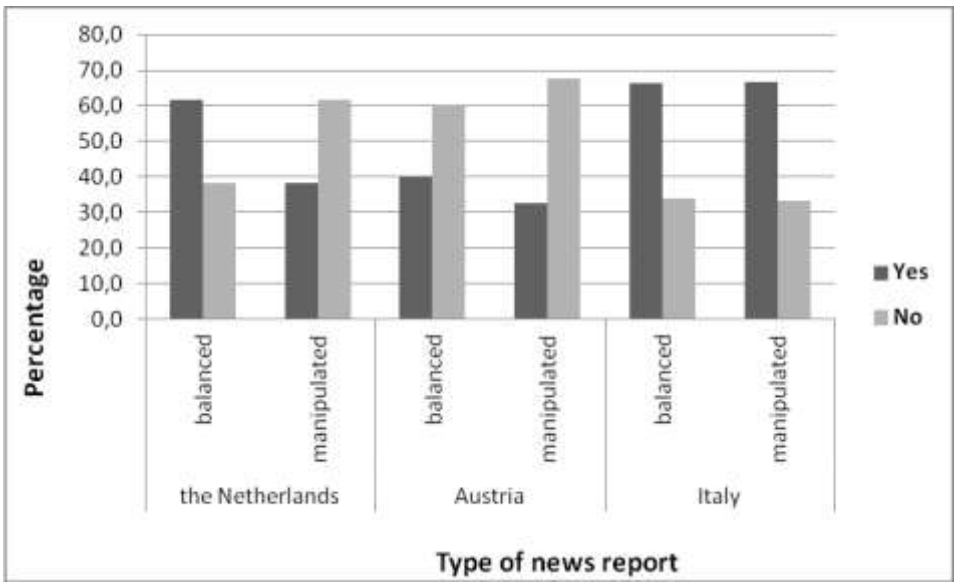
*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

When the 'traditional and 'alternative' subtypes were merged and the combined balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports were compared, a significant difference in perception of the different versions of the news reports was noted only in the Dutch sample. In particular, almost 62% of those who read the 'manipulated' version did not regard it as balanced compared to 38% of those who read the 'traditional' version. Although more Austrian participants in the 'manipulated' condition held the same opinion, the difference with those in the 'traditional' condition was not so great - 67.6% vs. 60.2%, respectively. The majority of Italian participants in just about equal numbers considered both versions of the news report as balanced (Tables 28 and Figures 15).

Table 28. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*61,6*	*38,3*	*39,8*	*32,5*	*66,2*	*66,7*
No	*38,4*	*61,7*	*60,2*	*67,6*	*33,9*	*33,3*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 15. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)



Additional information on percent distribution of responses to this question can be found in Appendix C.

3) Responses to the question about 'allegation-loadedness' differed according to the subtypes within both the balanced and the manipulated versions of the news reports. As is seen from Table 29, in all the three samples, a higher number of participants regarded the 'alternative' subtype of the balanced version of the news report as more allegation-loaded compared to the 'traditional' one. In addition, the Italians showed the biggest difference in perception between the two subtypes, followed by the Dutch and, then, by the Austrians. As to the manipulated version of the news report, the Dutch participants judged the 'alternative' subtype as less allegation-loaded compared to the 'traditional' one. There were no differences in perception of both the subtypes in the Austrian and the Italian samples. In addition, the large majority of the Austrian and the Dutch participants said the manipulated news reports were not free of allegations, whereas a majority of the Italian participants held the opposite opinion (Tables 29 - 30).

Table 29. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Yes	*38,8*	*26,7*	*24,2*	*20,0*	*56,7*	*38,6*
No	*61,2*	*73,3*	*75,8*	*80,0*	*43,3*	*61,4*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

Table 30. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Yes	*7,5*	*18,8*	*14,1*	*18,4*	*57,5*	*58,5*
No	*92,5*	*81,1*	*85,9*	*81,7*	*42,5*	*41,5*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

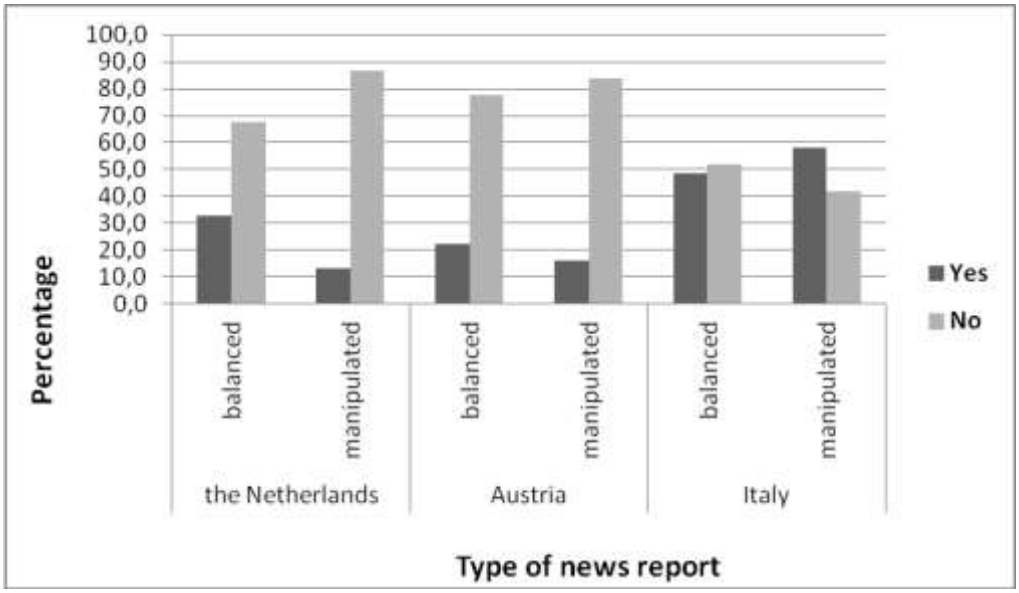
*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

The comparison made between the balanced and manipulated versions with the merged 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes demonstrated that both versions were considered as allegation-loaded by the Austrian and the Dutch participants; although the balanced version in both cases was regarded to a lesser degree as having allegations. At the same time, more Italian participants viewed the balanced version as allegation-loaded and the manipulated version as allegation-free (Tables 31 and Figures 16).

Table 31. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the type of the news report (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*32,6*	*13,2*	*22,2*	*16,2*	*48,4*	*58,2*
No	*67,4*	*86,7*	*77,8*	*83,8*	*51,7*	*41,9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 16. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the type of the news report (by country)



Additional information on percent distribution of responses to this question can be found in Appendix C.

4) Responses to the question about 'overall trust' differed according to the subtypes within both the balanced and the manipulated versions of the news reports. As Table 32 shows, a nearly equal number of the Austrian participants regarded different subtypes of the balanced version as trusted or mistrusted. However, a higher percentage in both cases stated that the news report cannot be trusted. At the same time, the Dutch and the Italian participants were more inclined to trust the news report. However, in both samples a higher percentage did not trust the 'alternative' subtype (Table 32). In regard to the manipulated version, the Dutch judged 'alternative' subtypes as more trustworthy, a majority of the Italian participants with almost equal percentage considered both subtypes as trustworthy, and only in the Austrian sample did a higher percentage view the 'alternative' subtype as untrustworthy and less trustworthy compared to the 'balanced' subtype (Tables 32 - 33).

Table 32. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Yes	*65,7*	*53,5*	*39,7*	*40,0*	*68,7*	*56,2*
No	*34,3*	*44,5*	*60,3*	*60,0*	*31,3*	*43,8*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

Table 33. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Yes	*49,3*	*60,9*	*49,1*	*43,3*	*80,0*	*78,6*
No	*50,8*	*39,1*	*50,9*	*56,6*	*20,0*	*21,5*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

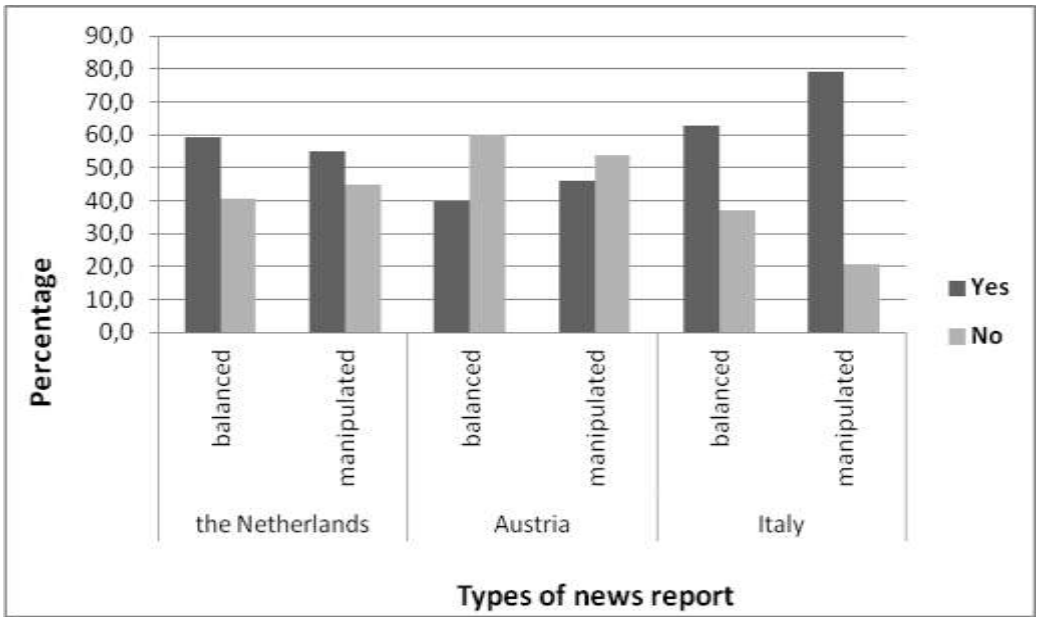
*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

When the 'traditional and the 'alternative' subtypes were merged within balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports and the combined versions were compared, it became evident that a higher percentage of the Austrian and the Italian participants viewed the balanced version as less trustworthy compared to the manipulated one, and an almost equal percentage of the Dutch regarded both versions as untrustworthy. With that, the majority of the Dutch and the Italian participants were more inclined to trust rather than mistrust both versions of the news reports (Tables 34 and Figures 17).

Table 34. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the type of the news report (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*59,4*	*55,1*	*39,8*	*46,2*	*62,8*	*79,0*
No	*40,5*	*44,8*	*60,2*	*53,8*	*37,2*	*20,9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 17. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the type of the news report (by country)

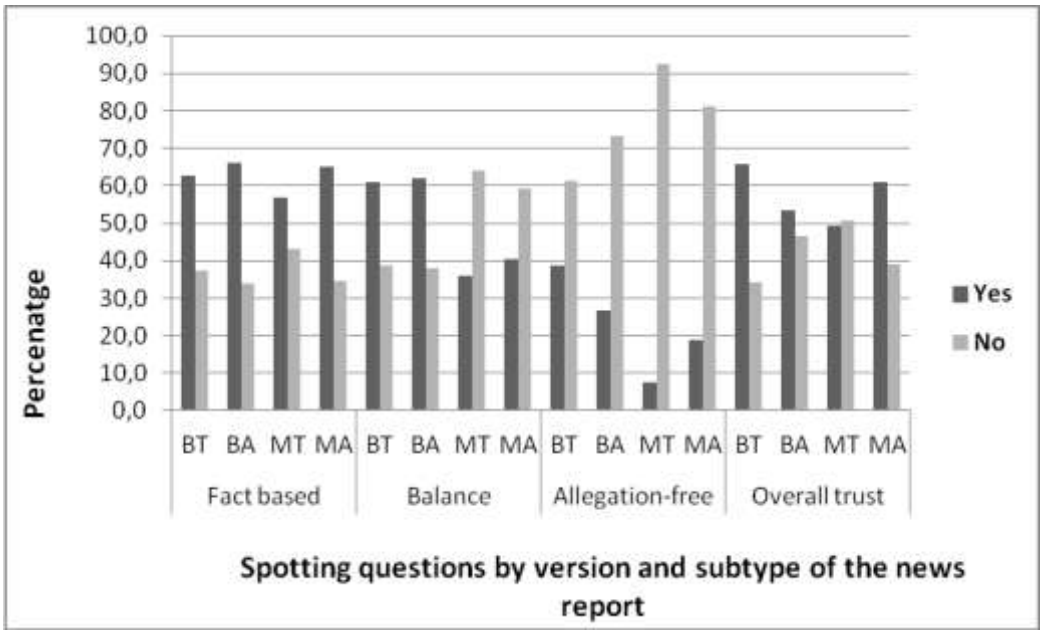


Additional information on percent distribution of responses to this question can be found in Appendix C.

The comparison made between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports within each country sample did not reveal any tendencies or regularities for the Austrian sample as to preferring one subtype over another when considering the news reports from the viewpoints of fact-basedness, balance, allegation-loadedness, and overall trust. The Dutch participants trusted the manipulated news report allegedly "taken from an alternative Internet news source" (denoted as "MA") to a higher degree than that "taken from a traditional Internet news source" (denoted as 'MT'); no

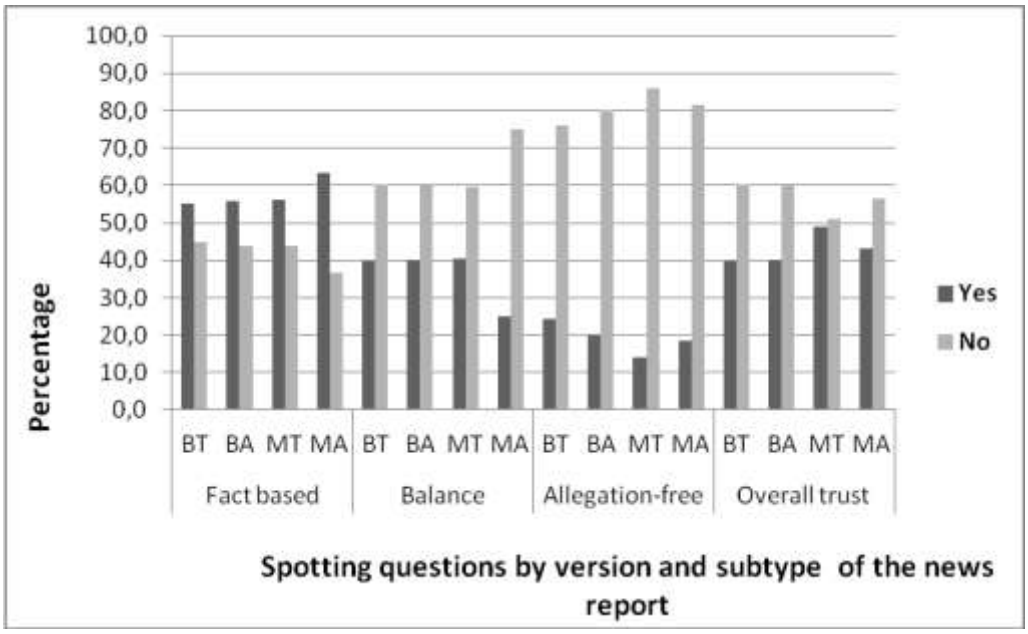
regularities in regard to subtypes of the balanced version were found. The Italian participants had less trust for the balanced version of the news report allegedly "taken from an alternative Internet news source" (denoted as 'BA') as compared to the one "taken from a traditional Internet news source" (denoted as 'BT'). Moreover, they placed higher trust in the manipulated version of the news report allegedly "taken from a traditional Internet news source" as compared to its 'alternative' counterpart in all but the "balance" questions. The results are shown in Figures 18-20 (where BT stands for 'balanced traditional', BA - 'balanced alternative', MT - 'manipulated traditional', MA - 'manipulated alternative').

Figure 18. Comparison between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports: the Netherlands*



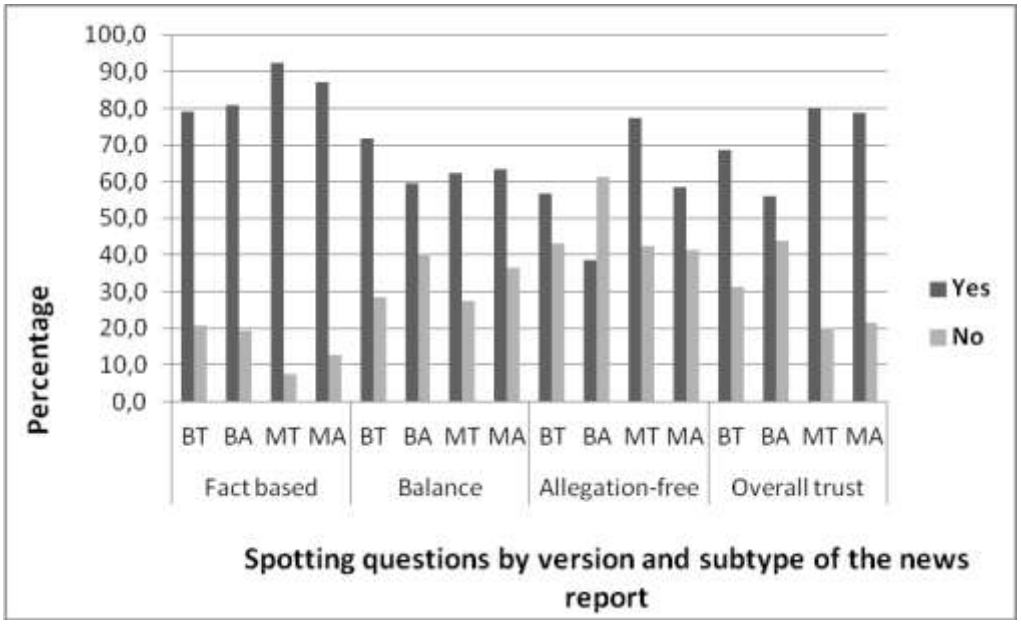
* BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative, MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Figure 19. Comparison between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports: Austria*



* BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative, MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Figure 20. Comparison between 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports: Italy*



* BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative, MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Finally, Table 35 provides summary statistics for the balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports for each country sample. As one can see, the mean and median values are

often similar or even identical between the two versions. Nevertheless, as it was shown above, in percentage terms differences in the perception of both versions still exist. However, the Italian participants remain trustful of the news reports the most.

Table 35. Summary statistics for the balanced and manipulated versions of the news reports (by country)

The news reports are...	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Fact-based	*M* = 2,7 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,7	*M* = 2,6 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,5 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,6 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 3,0 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,7	*M* = 3,2 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6
Balanced	*M* = 2,7 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,4 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,2 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,7 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,7 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6
Free from allegations	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,0 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,0 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,7	*M* = 2,0 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,5 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,7	*M* = 2,5 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6
Overall can be trusted	*M* = 2,6 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,5 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,4 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,7 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,8 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,5
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

B. Spotting scales: ordinal and binomial

Ordinal spotting scale consisting of four questions

All questions on the scale were statistically significant and positively correlated (see the information on correlations in Appendix C).

As is seen from Table 36, on average, there are not significant differences in perception between the balanced and manipulated versions of the news report. In particular, mean and median values in the Austrian sample are identical and in the Dutch and Italian samples are close to each other as regards both versions of the news report and lie between the values of '2', which itself means that the news report is rather not fact-based, balanced, free of allegations and trusted, and '3', which itself means that the news report is still rather fact-based, balanced, allegation-free and trusted. However, in addition, the average values for the majority of the Italian participants were closer to '3', and, specifically, the manipulated version

of the news report scored higher compared to the balanced one, that is as rather not manipulated. Table 37 provides details of the percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions*.

Table 36. Summary statistics for the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions* according to the type of news report (by country)

	Netherlands		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Ordinal spotting scale of four questions	*M* = 2,5 Md = 2,5 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,4 Md = 2,2 SD = 0,4	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,2 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,2 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,7 Md = 2,7 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,8 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,5
TOTAL, *N*	**138**	**136**	**108**	**117**	**121**	**110**

Table 37. Percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions* according to the type of the news report (by country)

Responses	**the Netherlands**		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely no	-	*0,7*	*0,9*	*0,9*	-	-
1,25	-	*0,7*	*3,7*	*1,7*	-	*0,9*
1,50	*0,7*	*1,5*	*4,6*	*5,1*	*0,8*	-
1,75	*6,5*	*7,4*	*7,4*	*10,3*	*4,1*	*1,8*
Rather no	*13,0*	*16,9*	*20,4*	*17,9*	*6,6*	*6,4*
2,25	*16,7*	*25,0*	*19,4*	*16,2*	*12,4*	*6,4*
2,50	*19,6*	*19,9*	*15,7*	*22,2*	*16,5*	*16,4*
2,75	*16,7*	*18,4*	*13,9*	*17,1*	*22,3*	*12,7*
Rather yes	*15,2*	*5,9*	*10,2*	*6,8*	*15,7*	*24,5*
3,25	*8,7*	*2,9*	*2,8*	*1,7*	*11,6*	*22,7*
3,50	*2,9*	*0,7*	-	-	*6,6*	*7,3*
3,75	-	-	*0,9*	-	*2,5*	-
Definitely yes	-	-	-	-	*0,8*	*0,9*
TOTAL, *%*	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

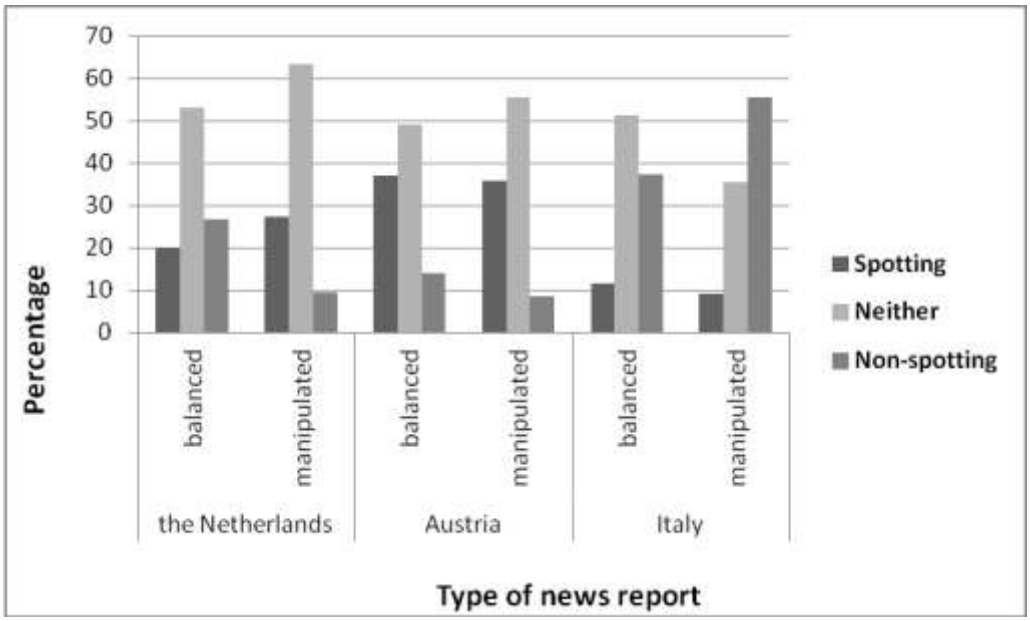
The percentage distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions* demonstrates that the percentage of those who, according to the criteria of the manipulated media information in this study, regarded the manipulated news reports as such (that is, from the value of '1' - 'definitely no' to the value of '2' - 'rather no' inclusive) was 35,9% for the Austrian sample, 27,2% for the Dutch sample and only 9,1% for the Italian sample. At the same time, the percentage of those who considered the manipulated version of the news report as not manipulated (that is, from the value of '4' - 'definitely yes' to the value of '3' - 'rather yes' inclusive) was 8,5%, 9,5% and 55,4%, respectively. All the other responses lay in between the values of '2' and '3' - 55,5%, 63,3% and 35,5%, respectively. The cumulative percentage numbers are shown in Table 38 and Figure 21.

The comparison of the cumulative percentage numbers between the two versions of the news reports demonstrates, in particular, that the balanced version was perceived as manipulated by an even higher percentage of the Austrian and Italian participants in comparison to the actual manipulated version. The reasons for this may be varied. For one, although the balanced version of the news report was pretested before conducting the experimental sessions, 'balanced' might still mean different things for different people and, for this reason, be perceived differently; or one specific viewpoint in the news report might be more impressive and significant for some participants, thus, exerting greater influence on them, in comparison to another, opposite viewpoint; or there may be some flaws in some persons' critical media literacy skills. A more detailed account of this is provided in the Conclusions.

Table 38. Cumulative percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions* according to the type of the news report (by country)

	Netherlands		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
'No' (as spotting)	*20,2*	*27,2*	*37,0*	*35,9*	*11,5*	*9,1*
Neither (in between)	*53,0*	*63,3*	*49,0*	*55,5*	*51,2*	*35,5*
'Yes' (as non-spotting)	*26,8*	*9,5*	*13,9*	*8,5*	*37,2*	*55,4*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 21. Cumulative percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions* according to the type of the news report (by country)



Ordinal spotting scale consisting of three questions

With the purpose of developing a better ordinal spotting scale, the question on the fact-basedness of the news reports was excluded from the scale, and, therefore, a news one consisting of three questions was created. However, the results of both scales were quite similar to each other. Consequently, the spotting scale of four questions was used further. Summary statistics as well as percent distribution for the *spotting scale of three questions* can be found in Appendix C.

Binomial spotting scale based on four questions

Transformation of the ordinal spotting scale consisted of four questions (*spotscale4*) on a binomial 'spotting/non-spotting' scale (combining 'definitely no' and 'rather no' response options under the name of 'spotting', and 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes' response options under the name of 'non-spotting') brought the following results (Table 39).

Table 39. Distribution of participant responses on the *binomial spotting scale based on four questions* (by news report type and by country)

Binomial response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Non-spotting, %	*82,6*	*77,9*	*68,5*	*71,8*	*90,1*	*91,8*
(*N*)	*(114)*	*(106)*	*(74)*	*(84)*	*(109)*	*(101)*
Spotting, %	*17,4*	*22,1*	*31,5*	*28,2*	*9,9*	*8,2*
(*N*)	*(24)*	*(30)*	*(34)*	*(33)*	*(12)*	*(9)*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
(*N*)	**(*138*)**	**(*136*)**	**(*108*)**	**(*117*)**	**(*121*)**	**(*110*)**

In other words, only participants who answered 'no' to all the four questions were regarded as those who spotted manipulation, whereas all the others - participants who had answered 'yes' to all the four questions as well as those who had as individuals answered 'no' to less than four questions - were considered as those who did not spot manipulated information. As is seen from the table, the Austrian participants took the lead in spotting manipulation in manipulated news reports; however, in effect, there is not much difference between the Austrians and the Dutch as to this factor given a higher number of participants in the Dutch sample. The Italians showed the lowest percentage of those who had potted manipulation in the manipulated type of the news report. Table 40 demonstrates the percentage of the participants who either chose 'yes' answers to all questions (referred to in the table as 'non-spotting') or responded 'no' to only 1 to 3 questions (referred to by the corresponding numbers of '1', '2' and '3') compared to those who had spotted manipulation.

Table 40. Detailed elaboration of percentage of 'non-spotting' compared to 'spotting' in participant responses on the *binomial spotting scale based on four questions* (by news report type and by country)

Detailed response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Non-spotting	*22,5*	*6,6*	*13,9*	*7,7*	*34,7*	*49,1*
1	*23,2*	*22,8*	*14,8*	*17,9*	*22,3*	*20,9*
2	*21,7*	*24,3*	*17,6*	*23,9*	*17,4*	*13,6*
3	*15,2*	*24,3*	*22,2*	*22,2*	*15,7*	*8,2*
Spotting	*17,4*	*22,1*	*31,5*	*28,2*	*9,9*	*8,2*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

4.2.3. Second outcome variable - Accepting Manipulated News Report Standpoint, or who should be blamed for the situation

The second outcome variable - accepting the standpoint(s) promoted in the manipulated news report - was measured by utilizing two questions. In particular, they aimed at revealing whether participants, first, understood or not the standpoint(s) a particular news report promoted and, second, personally accepted or not the standpoint(s), specifically, of the manipulated version of the news report. The standpoint(s) was understood to mean the attribution of responsibility for the death(s) of the protester(s) that was described in the news reports. The first of the two questions read *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* and had four response options: definitely yes, rather yes, rather no, definitely no. The second question asked *"Please indicate on whom you personally place responsibility for the deaths described?"* (the underlining was used in the study questionnaire) and contained four response options: protesters, police, president, unclear. Participants were allowed to select more than one response option. As Tables 41 shows, with regard to the first question, different subtypes of news reports - 'balanced traditional' (BT) and 'balanced alternative' (BA) - were assessed quite similarly by the Austrian participants. However, there was a difference between BT and BA conditions in the Dutch and Italian samples, where more participants in BT condition said it was not clear for them who was responsible for the deaths described. With respect to the manipulated version of the news report (Table 42), a higher number of the Austrian and Italian participants in the MT condition said it was clear who was responsible compared to those in the MA condition, whereas in the Dutch sample more participants in the MA condition said the same.

Table 41. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Yes	*22,4*	*29,6*	*17,2*	*16,0*	*31,4*	*36,9*
No	*77,6*	*70,4*	*82,8*	*84,0*	*68,6*	*63,1*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

Table 42. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Yes	*26,9*	*36,2*	*45,6*	*38,3*	*57,5*	*51,4*
No	*73,1*	*63,8*	*54,4*	*61,7*	*42,5*	*48,6*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

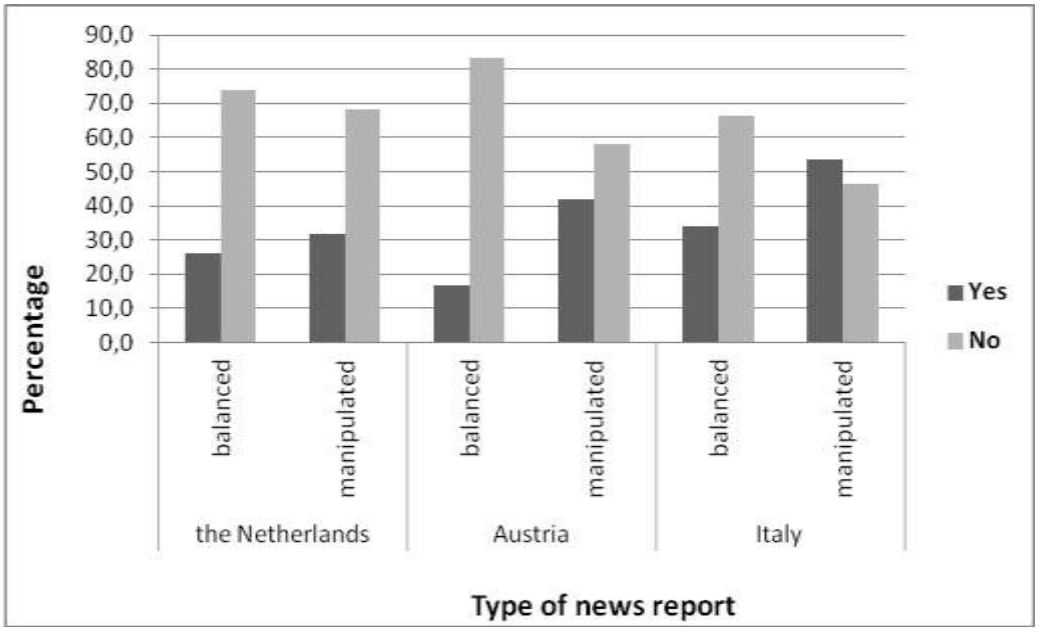
*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Nevertheless, of greater interest was the general comparison made between different versions of the news report - balanced and manipulated - without their subdivision into 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes (Table 43 and Figure 22). As is seen from the table, in the balanced condition, 83,3% of the Austrian participants, 73.9% of the Dutch participants and 66.1% of the Italian participants said it was not clear for them who is responsible for the deaths described in the news report. Given that different standpoints on the situation as well as assigning responsibility were presented in the balanced version of the news report, a priori it was hypothesized that, at least, not all participants would have a clear understanding who was responsible for the deaths. On the other hand, in the manipulated condition, 58.1% of the Austrian participants and 68.4% of the Dutch participants said it was not clear who is responsible compared to 41.9% of the Austrians and 31.7% of the Dutch who said it was. In turn, in the Italian sample 53.6% of participants said it was clear compared to 46.4% of those who said it was not. Again, a priori, it was hypothesized that those who stated that it was not clear who is responsible may have answered this way either due to the manipulated nature of the news report, and thus any standpoint which it contained cannot be trusted and accepted at its face value. Or less likely, because participants simply could not choose on whom to place responsibility.

Table 43. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* according to the two versions of the news report (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*26,1*	*31,7*	*16,7*	*41,9*	*33,9*	*53,6*
No	*73,9*	*68,3*	*83,3*	*58,1*	*66,1*	*46,4*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
(*N*)	**(*138*)**	**(*136*)**	**(*108*)**	**(*117*)**	**(*124*)**	**(*110*)**

Figure 22. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* according to the two versions of the news report (by country)



Thus, following the aforementioned logic and given the results obtained for this question, the Austrian and the Dutch participants in both conditions and the Italian participants in the balanced condition were expected to perform well as to judging who is responsible for the situation described, and not accepting the standpoint of the manipulated version of the news report without reservation. The next question asked participants to indicate who in their personal opinion is responsible for the deaths described in the news

report, and was supposed to further elucidate whether participants' personal opinions were the same as the standpoint(s) proposed by the news reports or whether they were distinguished from them. Tables 44 - 46 demonstrate the distributions of participant responses to the question according to the subtypes of the news report versions and, then cumulatively, for the combined balanced and manipulated versions.

In respect to the balanced condition, it is regarded as a normal situation when opinions are scattered across response options as different viewpoints as to who is responsible were presented in this version of the news report. With that, a majority of participants in all the three samples considered the situation described as 'unclear' in terms of being able to express a decided opinion on the subject (Table 44). That is exactly what was hypothesized a priori for perception with this kind of news report.

Table 44. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Protesters	*7,5*	*15,5*	*13,8*	*12,0*	*4,7*	*5,3*
Police	*11,9*	*8,5*	*12,1*	*2,0*	*12,5*	*14,0*
President	*4,5*	*7,0*	*5,2*	*8,0*	*18,8*	*10,0*
President and police	-	*2,8*	-	-	*1,6*	-
Protesters and police	*3,0*	*5,6*	-	-	-	-
Protesters and president	-	-	-	-	-	-
All of them	*3,0*	*2,8*	-	-	-	-
Unclear	*70,1*	*57,7*	*69,0*	*78,0*	*62,5*	*70,2*
TOTAL, % (*N*)	**100% (*67*)**	**100% (*71*)**	**100% (*58*)**	**100% (*50*)**	**100% (*64*)**	**100% (*57*)**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

When the analysis was done by subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report, it turned out that in the Dutch sample a higher percentage of participants accepted the news report standpoint in the 'alternative' condition compared to the 'traditional' one (47.8% vs. 37.3%, respectively), and in the Italian sample a reverse situation took place - 70% in the

'traditional' condition vs. 52.9% in the 'alternative' one (Table 45). This corresponds to the data with questions on spotting when the Dutch participants regarded the 'manipulated alternative' and the Italian participants the 'manipulated traditional' news reports as generally less manipulated (or more trustworthy, in other words) compared to their respective counterparts.

Table 45. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Protesters	*6,0*	-	*1,8*	*1,7*	-	*4,3*
Police	*9,0*	*17,4*	*35,1*	*30,0*	*32,5*	*15,7*
President	*11,9*	*11,6*	*22,8*	*13,3*	*37,5*	*34,3*
President and police	*16,4*	*18,8*	-	*1,7*	-	*2,9*
Protesters and police	*3,0*	*1,4*	-	-	-	-
Protesters and president	-	-	-	-	-	-
All of them	*3,0*	*8,7*	-	-	-	-
Unclear	*50,7*	*42,0*	*40,4*	*53,3*	*30,0*	*42,9*
TOTAL, % (*N*)	**100% (*67*)**	**100% (*69*)**	**100% (*57*)**	**100% (*60*)**	**100% (*40*)**	**100% (*70*)**

*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Further comparison made between the balanced and manipulated conditions, (that is, the versions of the news reports without their subdivision into 'traditional' and 'alternative' conditions), revealed that in the manipulated condition the percent number of participants who could not offer a definite opinion as to placing responsibility was from 1.4 to 2 times less than in the balanced condition. In particular, given that in this version of the news report the responsibility was allegedly assigned to the police and/or president, participants who selected the response options 'police', 'president' or both were judged as those who accepted the standpoint of the manipulated news report. Overall, 51.3% of the Austrian participants, 42.6% of the Dutch participants and 59.1% of the Italian participants, upon reading the manipulated news report, indicated that in their personal opinion, responsibility must be assigned to either

the police, or president, or both (Table 46). Consequently, the aforementioned percentage of participants in each sample showed susceptibility to influence by manipulated media information in adopting the event evaluation the news report promoted.

Table 46. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* according to the two versions of the news report (by country)

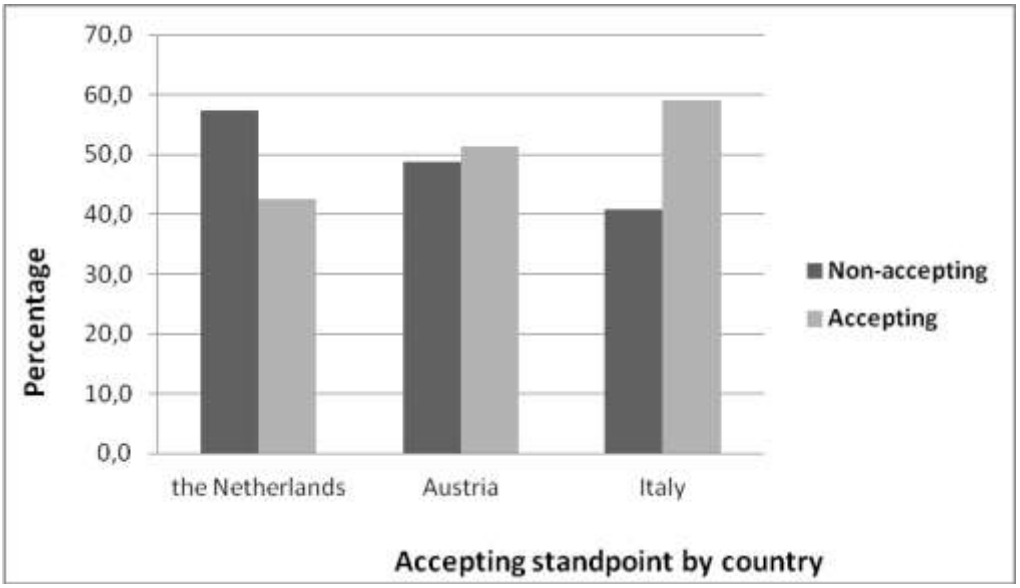
Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Protesters	*11,6*	*2,9*	*13,0*	*1,7*	*5,0*	*2,7*
Police	*10,1*	*13,2*	*7,4*	*32,5*	*13,2*	*21,8*
President	*5,8*	*11,8*	*6,5*	*17,9*	*14,9*	*35,5*
President and police	*1,4*	*17,6*	-	*0,9*	*0,8*	*1,8*
Protesters and police	*4,3*	*2,2*	-	-	-	-
Protesters and president	-	-	-	-	-	-
All of them	*2,9*	*5,9*	-	-	-	-
Unclear	*63,8*	*46,3*	*73,1*	*47,0*	*66,1*	*38,2*
TOTAL, % (*N*)	**100% (*138*)**	**100% (*136*)**	**100% (*108*)**	**100% (*117*)**	**100% (*121*)**	**100% (*110*)**

Further, as the manipulated news report standpoints indicated that the police or president or both should have been blamed, these options were combined under the value of '1 - 'accepting standpoint', and the others under the value of '0 - non-accepting standpoint'. This recoded question for placing responsibility with two categorical values brought the following results for the manipulated news report (Table 47 and Figure 23):

Table 47. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* (the manipulated version of the news report; categorical values; by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	N	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*
Non-accepting standpoint	*78*	*57,4%*	*57*	*48,7%*	*45*	*40,9%*
Accepting standpoint	*58*	*42,6%*	*60*	*51,3%*	*65*	*59,1%*
TOTAL, N (%)	**136**	**100%**	**117**	**100%**	**110**	**100%**

Figure 23. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* (the manipulated type of the news report; categorical values; by country)



As is seen from the above, the Dutch participants gain the lead in not accepting the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report followed by the Austrian participants. However, the difference in 'accepting/non-accepting' is less substantial for the Austrians as compared to the Dutch and the Italians.

When the variable with two categorical values for placing responsibility was tested according to the subtypes of the manipulated news report, the results were as follows (Table 48):

Table 48. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (categorical; by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Non-accepting standpoint	*62,7%*	*52,2%*	*42,1%*	*55,0%*	*30,0%*	*47,1%*
Accepting standpoint	*37,3%*	*47,8%*	*57,9%*	*45,0%*	*70,0%*	*52,9%*
TOTAL, % (*N*)	**100% (*67*)**	**100% (*69*)**	**100% (*57*)**	**100% (*60*)**	**100% (*40*)**	**100% (*70*)**

*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Hence, the Exploratory Question 3, which asked whether there is any difference in perception of 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the news report, is supported to the extent that within the manipulated condition the news report allegedly taken from an alternative Internet news sources is trusted more by the Dutch participants compared to the traditional Internet news sources, whereas one allegedly taken from traditional Internet news sources is regarded as more trustworthy by the Italian and the Austrian participants compared to the alternative Internet news sources. Although, when asked about the trustworthiness of these two types of Internet news sources, the Dutch, the Italians and the Austrians judged the alternative ones as less trustworthy compared to the traditional news sources. Presumably, only when manipulated media information was encountered, did it become significant for the news consumers of all three countries what type of Internet news source reported the information, for this predetermined the level of trust in the news. This finding will be discussed in further detail in the Conclusions.

When a chi-square test for independence was performed within the manipulated condition (the manipulated news report without its subdivision into two subtypes) for the recoded questions *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* and *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"*, both transformed into questions with binary responses ('yes/no' for the former and 'accepting/non-accepting' for the latter), the results were significant for all the three samples. In particular, for the Austrian sample the result was χ^2(df = 1, N = 117) = 19.81, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.411; for the Dutch sample the result was χ^2(df = 1, N = 136) = 38.60, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.533; and for the Italian sample the result was χ^2(df = 1, N = 110) =

30.22, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.524.

Thus, the results suggest that a strong positive association exists in all samples between understanding who is named responsible for the death(s) of the protester(s) in the manipulated news report and the personal placing of responsibility by the study participants. In other words, those of the participants who answered that it was unclear from the news report who was responsible for the deaths were unlikely to accept the standpoint(s) promoted in the manipulated news report. And vice versa: those of the participants who responded that it was clear who was responsible more likely accepted the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report. Table 49 demonstrates the results.

Finally, when a chi-square test for independence with the same questions was conducted for each of the two subtypes of the manipulated news report, for the Austrian and the Italian samples, the results for the 'traditional' subtype appeared to be much worse compared to the results for the 'alternative' subtype. In particular, for the Austrian sample the results were χ^2(df = 1, N = 57) = 4.52, p < 0.05, Phi value is 0.282 for the 'traditional' subtype and χ^2(df = 1, N = 60) = 16.67, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.527 - for the 'alternative' subtype; for the Italian sample the results were χ^2(df = 1, N = 40) = 4.10, p < 0.05, Phi value is 0.320 for the 'traditional' subtype and χ^2(df = 1, N = 69) = 27.63, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.628 for the 'alternative' subtype. As to the Dutch sample, the results were comparable across the two subtypes for the manipulated news report; however, slightly higher indices were found for the 'alternative' one: χ^2(df = 1, N = 69) = 20.56, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.546 as compared to χ^2(df = 1, N = 67) = 17.23, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.507 for the 'traditional' subtype.

Table 49. Chi-square test for independence between recoded questions *'is it clear who is responsible'* and *'placing responsibility'* by country (the manipulated news report)

SAMPLE	Placing responsibility		Is it clear who is responsible for the death(s) described		TOTAL
			NO	YES	
DUTCH	Non-accepting standpoint	N	70	8	***78***
		%	*75,3%*	*18,6%*	***57,4%***
		Adjusted residuals	6,2	- 6,2	
	Accepting standpoint	N	23	35	***58***
		%	*24,7%*	*81,4%*	***42,6%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 6,2	6,2	
	TOTAL	***N***	***93***	***43***	**136**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**
AUSTRIAN	Non-accepting standpoint	N	45	12	***57***
		%	*66,2%*	*24,5%*	***48,7%***
		Adjusted residuals	4,5	- 4,5	
	Accepting standpoint	N	23	37	***60***
		%	*33,8%*	*75,5%*	***51,3 %***
		Adjusted residuals	- 4,5	4,5	
	TOTAL	***N***	***68***	***49***	**117**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**
ITALIAN	Non-accepting standpoint	N	35	10	***45***
		%	*68,6%*	*16,9%*	***40,9%***
		Adjusted residuals	5,5	- 5,5	
	Accepting standpoint	N	16	49	***65***
		%	*31,4%*	*83,1%*	***59,1%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 5,5	5,5	
	TOTAL	***N***	***51***	***59***	**110**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**

4.3. Measurement participant attitudes toward the scene of action of the news report - Republic of Moldova

Given that both types of the news reports depicted events that supposedly took place in Moldova, I measured participants' attitudes toward the country, ranging from '1', 'very unfavorable', to '5', 'very favorable'. No significant differences were found between those who read 'balanced' and 'manipulated' news reports later in the experiment. In subsequent statistical tests, the participant attitudes toward Moldova have been naturally taken into account. Please see Appendix C for detailed numbers.

4.4. Statistical tests of the study Hypotheses and Exploratory Questions

4.4.1. Tests of the study Hypotheses

There were two explanatory and two outcome variables in the study. The first explanatory variable was 'individual political competence', which was measured using the *political competence* scale. The second explanatory variable was a 'country media literacy context', which was measured by applying the *citizenship* variable as a proxy. This variable had three levels, coded '1' for participants with Austrian citizenship, '2' for those with Dutch citizenship and '3' for persons with Italian citizenship. The first outcome variable was 'spotting manipulated information', which was measured using the *binomial spotting scale*. The second outcome variable was 'accepting a news report standpoint(s)', which was measured by the question *placing responsibility [for the deaths]-recoded*.

To test *Hypothesis 1*, which stated that individuals with higher levels of political competence should be more able to spot manipulated media information, logistic regression by country was run with the *political competence scale* and the *binomial spotting scale* as the explanatory and outcome variables, respectively. Results turned out to be non-significant for every country (Table 50). Exclusion of those participants who had studied political science from the analysis did not change the overall picture.

Table 50. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the manipulated news report with the *political competence scale* as the explanatory variable (by country)

Condition	***Explanatory variable***	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	Political competence scale	-.043	.033	.957	.195
	Constant	*-.194*	*.822*	*.824*	*.813*
Austrian	Political competence scale	-.047	.042	.954	.261
	Constant	*-.098*	*.796*	*.906*	*.901*
Italian	Political competence scale	.046	.064	1.047	.468
	Constant	*-3.299*	*1.277*	*.037*	*.010*

When logistic regression tests were run separately for the subtypes of the manipulated news report, the *political competence scale* was significant at $p < 0.1$ for the Dutch for the 'traditional' subtype of the news report ($\chi^2 = 3{,}24$, $df = 1$, $N = 66$, $p < 0.08$) (Table 51); results remained non-significant for the 'alternative' subtypes for every country. Interestingly, the beta (B) coefficient is negative, so possessing higher levels of political competence makes the Dutch participants less likely to spot manipulated information in the 'traditional' subtype of the manipulated news report. Moreover, when those of the Dutch participants who studied political science were excluded from the logistic regression test on this subtype of the news report, the results improved ($\chi^2 = 4{,}46$, $df = 1$, $N = 35$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 52). To put it another way, the type of the news source affected how Dutch participants assessed the information the news source provided: trust in manipulated information coming from 'traditional' Internet news sources increased as individual levels of political competence advanced. As such, in the Dutch sample, higher political competence was associated with higher trust in 'traditional' Internet news sources. Thus here the role of political competence appeared to be different from that suggested by the *Hypothesis 1*.

Table 51. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the news report with *political competence scale* as the explanatory variable (by country)

Condition	***Explanatory variable***	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	Political competence scale	-.079	.045	.924	.078
	Constant	*.742*	*1.076*	*2.101*	*.490*
Austrian	Political competence scale	-.028	.058	.972	.627
	Constant	*-.497*	*1.078*	*.608*	*.645*
Italian	Political competence scale	.133	.118	1.142	.257
	Constant	*-5.364*	*2.579*	*.005*	*.038*

Table 52. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the news report with *political competence scale* as the explanatory variable (the Dutch participants not affiliated themselves with political science department)

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Political competence scale	-.116	.059	.890	.050
	Constant	*1.843*	*1.364*	*6.313*	*.177*

Testing each of the five components of the *political competence scale* as explanatory variables separately and spotting as the outcome variable, by country and subtype of the manipulated news report, revealed that *'interest in politics'* (*interpol*), *'intentional getting political information from news media'* (*polinfor*) and *'factual political knowledge'* (*polqscal*) were significant for the Dutch sample in 'manipulated traditional' condition ($\chi^2 = 5{,}38$ $df = 1$, $N = 67$, $p < 0.05$; $\chi^2 = 6{,}30$ $df = 1$, $N = 67$, $p < 0.05$ and $\chi^2 = 2{,}88$ $df = 1$, $N = 67$, $p < 0.1$) (Table 53 - 55). The beta (B) coefficients were negative in all cases.

Table 53. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the news report with *interest in politics* as the explanatory variable

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Interest in politics	-.842	.374	.431	.024
	Constant	*1.778*	*1.320*	*5.920*	*.178*
Austrian	Interest in politics	-.061	.381	.941	.873
	Constant	*-.787*	*1.001*	*.455*	*.432*
Italian	Interest in politics	.152	.777	1.164	.845
	Constant	*-2.860*	*1.904*	*.057*	*.133*

Table 54. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the news report with *intentional getting political information from news media* as the explanatory variable

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Getting political information	-.374	.153	.688	.014
	Constant	*.710*	*.786*	*2.035*	*.366*
Austrian	Getting political information	-.109	.158	.897	.493
	Constant	*-.506*	*.687*	*.603*	*.461*
Italian	Getting political information	.164	.283	1.178	.562
	Constant	*-3.131*	*1.352*	*.044*	*.021*

Table 55. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the news report with *factual political knowledge* as the explanatory variable

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Factual political knowledge	-.318	.190	.728	.095
	Constant	*.312*	*.895*	*1.366*	*.728*
Austrian	Factual political knowledge	.253	.203	1.288	.212
	Constant	*-1.945*	*.881*	*.143*	*.027*
Italian	Factual political knowledge	1.040	.679	2.831	.125
	Constant	*-7.697*	*3.704*	*.000*	*.038*

When those Dutch participants who studied political science were excluded from the analysis, the results for *interest in politics* and *intentional getting political information from news media* remained much the same. However, values of chi-square, beta coefficients and significance level for *factual political knowledge* improved considerably ($\chi^2 = 10{,}65$ $df = 1$, $N = 36$, $p < 0.01$) (Table 56).

Table 56. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the news report with *factual political knowledge* as the explanatory variable (the Dutch participants not affiliated with political science department)

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Factual political knowledge	-.943	.354	.390	.008
	Constant	*3.213*	*1.485*	*24.861*	*.030*

Therefore, *Hypothesis 1* was not supported. Moreover, statistically significant results with negative beta coefficients for *interest in politics*, *intentional getting political information from news media* and *factual political knowledge* found in the Dutch sample go to prove that (1) the less participants were interested in politics, (2) the less they intentionally consumed political information from the news media, and (3) the less factual political knowledge they demonstrated, then the more the Dutch participants were able to spot manipulated media information in the news report which allegedly was taken from 'traditional' Internet news sources.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that those with higher levels of political competence should be less likely to accept a standpoint from the manipulated news report as to who should be blamed for the situation described in the news report. Logistic regression analysis for the manipulated news report condition was performed with the recoded question on placing responsibility with two categorical response options, 'non-accepting/accepting', as the outcome variable and *political competence scale* as the explanatory variable. The test results were not significant for any sample. Conducting logistic regression analysis for each of the two subtypes of the manipulated news report brought the same results of non-significance. Therefore, *Hypothesis 2* was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that manipulated media information in the Internet news report on a novel international affairs topic would more likely be spotted in countries with a more advanced media literacy context. To check the hypothesis, I ran a logistic regression test. The variable depicting citizenship was used as an explanatory variable, and the binomial scale of spotting was used as an outcome variable. Given that spotting manipulation in manipulated news reports was of primary interest for this study, tests were conducted for this condition only: first, for the manipulated news reports without their subdivision into 'traditional' and

'alternative' subtypes; and second, for each of the subtypes separately.

Thus, for the manipulated type of the news report, logistic regression analysis brought the following results shown in Table 57 below (with 'Italian' as a reference category):

Table 57. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the manipulated news report with *media literacy context* as the explanatory variable (reference category 'Italian')

Condition	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	1.156	.405	3.176	.004
Austrian	1.484	.404	4.409	.000
Constant	*-2.418*	*.348*	*.089*	*.000*

As one can see, when only *citizenship* was entered into the equation, the model was significant (χ^2 = 16,60, *df* = 2, *N* = 363, $p < 0.001$), indicating that from 4.5% to 7% of the variance in whether manipulated media information spotting can be predicted from this variable. The odds of spotting manipulation in news reports were 4.4 times higher for the Austrian and 3.2 times higher for the Dutch participants as compared to the Italians. When the reference category was changed from 'Italian' to 'Austrian', 'Dutch' was not significant. This result underlined that both the Dutch and the Austrian participants showed closely similar scores as to spotting (in fact, manipulation was spotted by 30 Dutch participants vs. 33 Austrian ones) (Table 58).

Table 58. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the manipulated news report with *media literacy context* as the explanatory variable (reference category 'Austrian')

Condition	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	-.328	.292	.720	.261
Italian	-1.484	.404	.227	.000
Constant	*-.934*	*.205*	*.393*	*.000*

When logistic regression tests were run separately for the subtypes of the manipulated news report, the results obtained showed lower significance levels as well as different odds ratios for the Dutch participants as compared to the Italians depending on a particular subtype of the manipulated news report: 3.9 for the 'traditional' and 2.7 for the 'alternative' (Tables 59 - 60).

Table 59. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'traditional' subtype of the manipulated news report with *media literacy context* as the explanatory variable (reference category 'Italian')

Condition	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	1.353	.665	3.869	.042
Austrian	1.571	.669	4.813	.019
Constant	*-2.512*	*.600*	*.081*	*.000*

Table 60. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the 'alternative' subtype of the manipulated news report with *media literacy context* as the explanatory variable (reference category 'Italian')

Condition	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	.999	.521	2.715	.055
Austrian	1.439	.514	4.217	.005
Constant	*-2.367*	*.427*	*.094*	*.000*

Given that some of the Austrian and the Dutch participants - and none of the Italians - studied political science, I tried to find out whether this characteristic may to a certain extent have been decisive in the *citizen* variable influence on spotting. I ran logistic regression analysis for the manipulated news report with the same explanatory and outcome variables but excluded those participants who stated they studied political science. The results were similar to those demonstrated above.

Thus, the obtained outcomes for *Hypothesis 3* indicate of the following:

(1) the two countries having more advanced media literacy contexts (the Netherlands and Austria) demonstrated higher scores on spotting manipulated media information as compared to the country ranked lower on the same criterion (Italy);

(2) however, in spotting, Austria showed somewhat higher scores compared to the Netherlands, which, in turn, ranked higher on media literacy context;

(3) in addition, for the Austrian participants, there was not much difference in the odds ratios for 'traditional' and 'alternative' conditions of the manipulated news report when compared to the reference condition, while the odds ratios for the Dutch, when compared to the Italians, showed difference as a function of a particular subtype of the news report. To put it differently, the degree of spotting manipulated media information was dependent on which Internet news sources provided the information - the traditional or the alternative ones;

(4) *citizenship*, as a proxy for the countries' media literacy context, accounted for only 4,5% - 7% of the of the variance in whether manipulated media information spotted can be predicted from the variable.

In view of the last, hierarchical logistic regression was performed with variables of the *political competence* scale, the *informed media mistrust* scale, and gender. Neither *political competence* scale nor gender were significant; *informed media mistrust* was significant at $p < 0.05$. In addition, the explanatory power of the model increased only slightly - to 6% -10%. The significance level and odds ratios for *Austrian* and *Dutch* also increased and became almost equal to each other. (Table 61).

Table 61. Summary of hierarchical logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the manipulated news report with *citizenship, political competence scale, informed media mistrust scale* and *gender* as explanatory variables (reference category 'Italian')

Condition	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	1.548	.467	4.700	.001
Austrian	1.613	.437	5.020	.000
Political competence scale	-.026	.025	.975	.299
Informed media mistrust scale	.739	.373	2.094	.047
Gender (1)*	.235	.299	1.265	.432
Constant	*-4.012*	*1.192*	*.018*	*.001*

*Variable entered: '*Female*'

However, when the *informed media mistrust scale* was entered as the explanatory variable with the *binomial spotting scale* as the outcome variable separately for each country, only for the Dutch case was there a positive significance at $p < 0.05$ (Table 62). In addition, when the manipulated news report was analyzed by the two subtypes, only the 'alternative' one eventually showed significance at $p < 0.05$ for the Dutch participants, whereas the 'traditional' was non-significant.

Table 62. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting spotting manipulated media information from the manipulated news report with *informed media mistrust scale* as the explanatory variable (by country)

Condition	***Explanatory variable***	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
Dutch	Informed media mistrust scale	1.568	.621	4.795	.012
	Constant	*-4.946*	*1.501*	*.007*	*.001*
Austrian	Informed media mistrust scale	.420	.488	1.521	.390
	Constant	*-1.936*	*1.190*	*.144*	*.104*
Italian	Informed media mistrust scale	.449	.808	1.567	.578
	Constant	*-3.528*	*2.088*	*.029*	*.091*

Hence, *Hypothesis 3* is supported only partly. Indeed, participants from the countries ranked higher on media literacy showed better scores on spotting manipulated media information. However, the relationship implies that some unobserved (in this study) variables exist as well as the moderating effects of different subtypes of the manipulated news reports in the Dutch and the Italian samples on spotting the manipulation.

Hypothesis 4 assumed that participants who spotted manipulation in the news report would not accept the standpoint it promoted as to assigning responsibility for the death(s) described. The hypothesis was tested using the chi-square test of independence. The test was conducted with two variables: the original variant of the question on 'placing responsibility' (*placeres*) and *binomial spotting scale*. However, given that the participants could choose multiple response options when responding to this question, not every option eventually had the expected values of more than 5. As is known from Cochran (1952), if the expected values

are less than 1 or if more than 20% of them are less than 5, the test results might be suspicious. Some scholars, however, consider this 'rule of thumb' as too restrictive (in particular, Conover (1999)). I ran the same test with the recoded question on 'placing responsibility' with two categorical response options - 'non-accepting/accepting standpoint'. The relation between the aforementioned variables was significant in the Austrian sample, χ^2(df = 1, N = 117) = 16.63, p <0.001, and the Dutch sample, χ^2(df = 1, N = 136) = 5.87, p <0.05. The relation was not significant in the Italian sample. The phi value was -0.377 for the Austrian sample, indicating a relationship of moderate strength between the variables, and -0.208 for the Dutch sample, indicating a weak relationship between the variables. Adding into the test the variables of gender, department affiliation (controlling for possible effects of studying political science) and the *informed media mistrust scale* as control variables did not produce significant results for any sample. Thus spotting manipulation in the news report and accepting the standpoint promoted by the manipulated news report were significantly and negatively related in the Austrian and the Dutch samples, implying that those who spotted manipulated media information would be unlikely to accept its standpoint(s). Interestingly, though, as Table 63 shows, in each of the three samples there were participants who 'spotted' manipulation in the news report, but who still accepted the standpoint: namely, who should be blamed for the death(s) of the protest participant(s).

Table 63. Chi-square test for independence between *placing responsibility - recoded* and the *binomial spotting scale* (by country)

			Non-spotting	Spotting	TOTAL
AUSTRIAN	**Non-accepting standpoint**	N	31	26	***57***
		%	*36,9%*	*78,8%*	***48,7%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 4,1	4,1	
	Accepting standpoint	N	53	7	***60***
		%	*63,1%*	*21,2%*	***51,3%***
		Adjusted residuals	4,1	- 4,1	
	TOTAL	***N***	***84***	***33***	**117**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**
DUTCH	**Non-accepting standpoint**	N	55	23	***78***
		%	*51,9%*	*76,7%*	***57,4%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 2,4	2,4	
	Accepting standpoint	N	51	7	***58***
		%	*48,1%*	*23,3%*	***42,6%***
		Adjusted residuals	2,4	- 2,4	
	TOTAL	***N***	***106***	***30***	**136**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**
ITALIAN	**Non-accepting standpoint**	N	39	6	***45***
		%	*38,6%*	*66,7%*	***40,9%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 1,6	1,6	
	Accepting standpoint	N	62	3	***65***
		%	*61,4%*	*33,3%*	***59,1%***
		Adjusted residuals	1,6	- 1,6	
	TOTAL	***N***	***101***	***9***	**110**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**

As is seen from the Table, seven participants in both the Austrian and the Dutch samples, and three participants in the Italian sample, accepted the standpoints despite 'spotting' manipulation. There was no 'preferred' subtype of the manipulated news report for those who at the same time 'spotted-and-accepted': as for the 'traditional one, there were four Austrian, three Dutch and two Italian participants who did so, whereas regarding the 'alternative' subtype, accordingly, three Austrian, four Dutch and one Italian participants showed such 'inconsistent' results. The reasons that made the participants accept - or agree with - the standpoint of the manipulated news report, although they had just moments before judged it to be based on facts, not balanced, loaded with allegations and such that it cannot be trusted, are not quite clear and can only be theoretically assumed here. The detailed account of

the issue will be given in the Conclusions.

4.4.2. Tests of the study Exploratory Questions

There were four exploratory questions in the study.

Exploratory Question 1 asked whether there is a relationship between a country's media literacy context and the level of informed media mistrust shown by the country's participants (the variable of the *informed media mistrust scale* was transformed into a categorical one with two response options 'overall positive attitudes/overall negative attitudes').

Cronbach's alpha computed for the *informed media mistrust scale* was 0.74 for the Austrian sample, 0.63 for the Dutch sample and 0.62 for the Italian sample.

Mean values for the *informed media mistrust* scale seem comparable across country samples, as is shown in Table 64.

Table 64. Average measures of *informed media mistrust scale* (by country)

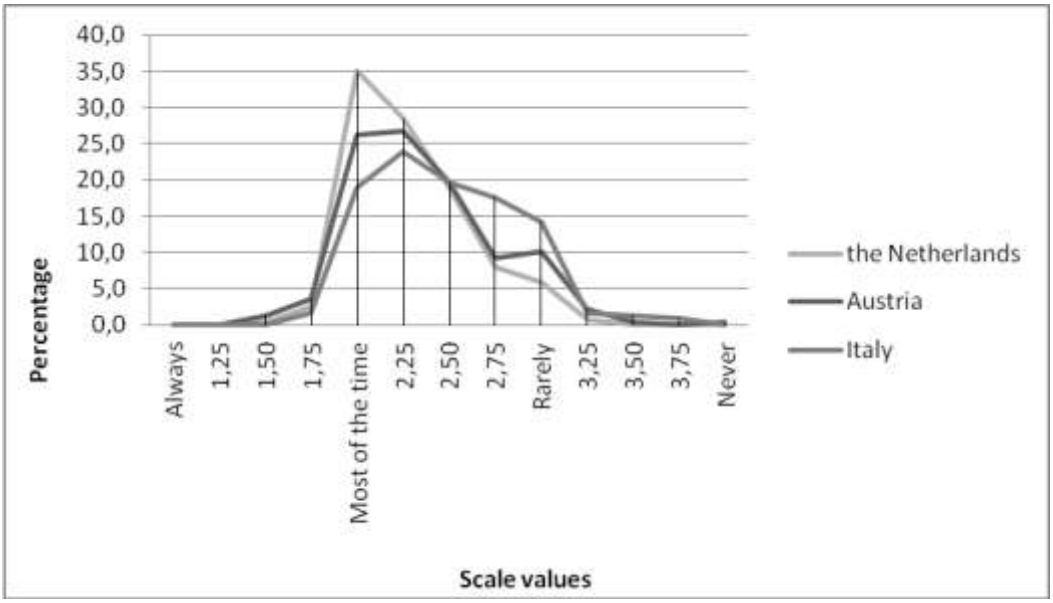
	Netherlands	**Austria**	**Italy**
Informed media mistrust scale	*X* = 2,3 Md = 2,2 SD = 0,3	*X* = 2,4 Md = 2,2 SD = 0,4	*X* = 2,5 Md = 2,5 SD = 0,4
TOTAL, *N*	**274**	**225**	**233**

However, looking at the scale values distribution in more detail, one can see that the Italian participants are to some degree more media skeptical compared to the Austrian and, especially, Dutch participants. Thus, if we take the value of 2,50 as the middle score of the scale, conditionally dividing it into two parts (figuratively speaking, 'higher media trust' vs. 'lower media trust'), we will see that 35.7 percent of the Italian participants expressed their mistrust toward news media in general compared to 22.5 percent of the Austrian participants and 14.5 percent of the Dutch participants. Moreover, those who stated their trust in news media in the range between 'rarely' and 'never' was 18.1 percent in the Italian case compared to 13.2 percent in the Austrian case and 6.5 percent in the Dutch case. The results are shown in Table 65 and Figure 24.

Table 65. *Informed media mistrust scale* values distribution, % & *N* (by country)

	Netherlands		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	%	*N*	***%***	*N*	***%***	*N*
Always	-	-	-	-	-	-
1,25	-	-	-	-	-	-
1,50	***0,4***	*1*	***1,3***	*3*	-	-
1,75	***2,6***	*7*	***3,6***	*8*	***1,7***	4
Most of the time	***35,0***	*96*	***26,2***	*59*	***18,9***	44
2,25	***28,5***	*78*	***26,7***	*60*	***24,0***	56
2,50	***19,0***	*52*	***19,6***	*44*	***19,7***	46
2,75	***8,0***	*22*	***9,3***	*21*	***17,6***	41
Rarely	***5,8***	*16*	***10,2***	*23*	***14,2***	33
3,25	***0,7***	*2*	***2,2***	*5*	***1,7***	4
3,50	-	-	***0,4***	*1*	***1,3***	3
3,75	-	-	-	-	***0,9***	2
Never	-	-	***0,4***	*1*	-	-
TOTAL, % (*N*)	***100%***	**(274)**	***100%***	**(225)**	***100%***	**(233)**

Figure 24. Percent distribution of values for *informed media mistrust scale* (by country)



Further analysis of each of the four questions comprising the *informed media mistrust* scale is described in Appendix C.

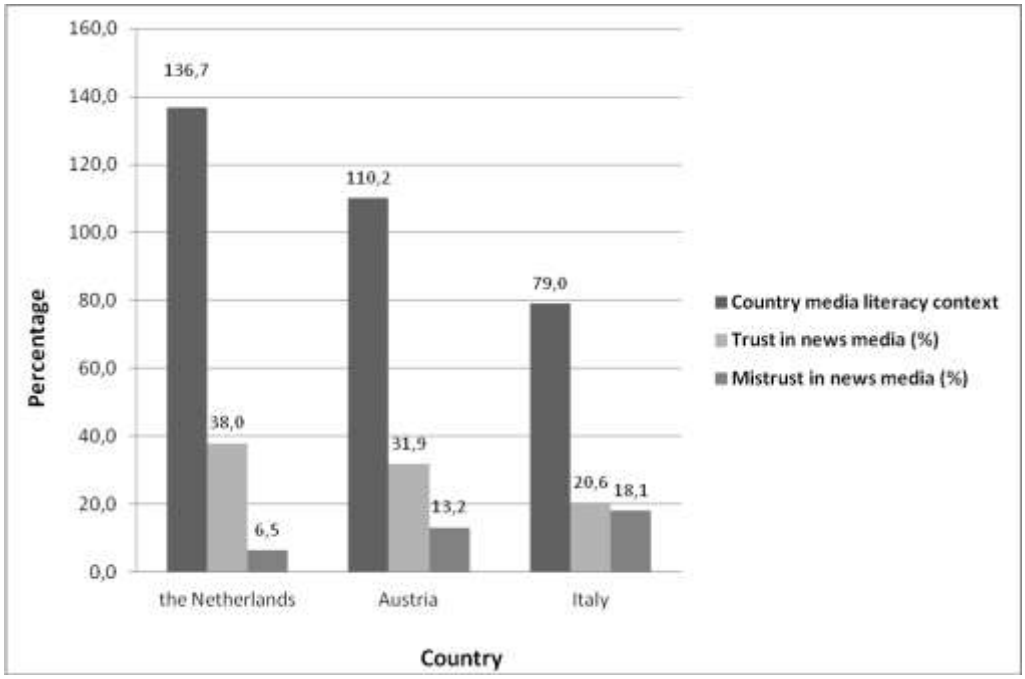
A chi-square test was employed to see if the relationship exists. The variables of *citizenship*, as a proxy for a country media literacy context, and *recoded informed media mistrust* scales were analyzed. The relationship between the two variables was statistically significant (χ^2(df = 2, N = 732) = 30.93, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's V value is 0.206). With that, based upon adjusted residuals values, the Dutch (adjusted residuals of 4,5/-4,5) and the Italian samples (adjusted residuals of -5,1/5,1) contributed the most to the significance in comparison to the Austrian sample (adjusted residuals of 0,5/-0,5). Table 66, combining the countries' media literacy contexts, mean and median values for the *informed media mistrust scale* by country, and percentage numbers for those who expressed clear positive or clear negative attitudes on the scale, demonstrates that the higher a country's media literacy context, the lower level of informed media mistrust that country's participants reveal (Table 66 & Figure 25).

Table 66. Relationship between *country media literacy context* and measures of *informed media mistrust scale* (by country)

Country	**Country overall Media Literacy rank**	**Measures of Informed Media Mistrust Scale (*imtscale*)**			**Total, *N***
		mean, median & SD values	***% of clearly positive attitudes toward trust in news media****	***% of clearly negative attitudes toward trust in news media*****	
Netherlands	*136,69*	*X = 2,3* *Md = 2,2* *SD = 0,32*	*38,0%*	*6,5%*	**274**
Austria	*110,17*	*X = 2,4* *Md = 2,2* *SD = 0,40*	*31,9%*	*13,2%*	**225**
Italy	*79,03*	*X = 2,5* *Md = 2,5* *SD = 0,40*	*20,6%*	*18,1%*	**233**

* combined responses 'always' and 'most of the time'; **combined responses 'rarely' and 'never'

Figure 25. Relationship between *country media literacy context* and measures of *informed media mistrust scale* (by country)



Therefore, the *Exploratory Question 1* can be answered in the affirmative: there is a statistically significant relationship between a country's media literacy rank and the level of informed media mistrust the country's participants show. Interestingly, though, the higher a country was ranked on media literacy, the higher media trust was demonstrated by the participants - which, to a certain extent, looks strange, for the more media literate a person is, the more critical he or she is expected to be of news media content in general. Moreover, the higher media literacy rank a country had, the wider the percentage gap was between overall 'trust' and 'mistrust' in news media. After the participants studying political science were excluded from the analysis, the results remained much the same.

Exploratory Question 2 asked whether political competence and informed media mistrust were related. To answer the question, Person's correlation test was performed with the *political competence scale* and *informed media mistrust scale*. Results of the test were non-significant for each sample. Components of the *political competence* scale tested separately against the *informed media mistrust* scale did not bring any significant results, either, nor did constituents of the latter when tested against the components of the former one by one. Controlling for gender and department affiliation did not change the picture. Consequently, political competence and informed media mistrust were not related; *Exploratory Question 2* is answered in the negative.

Exploratory Question 3 asked whether there was a difference in perception of the manipulated news report allegedly taken from 'traditional' and 'alternative' Internet news sources as to spotting manipulation and accepting the standpoint the news report promoted. As was shown previously in the subsection of this chapter on Descriptive statistics, the answer was positive, at least, for the Dutch and the Italian samples. Thus the Dutch participants who read the manipulated news report overall regarded its 'alternative' subtype as more trustworthy in the sense that it was viewed as less manipulated on the spotting scale compared to the 'traditional' one, and the standpoint of the former was accepted by a higher number of the participants compared to the latter. Conversely, the Italian participants credited the 'traditional' subtype of the manipulated news report with greater trust compared to the 'alternative' subtype as regards spotting manipulation and accepting the report's standpoint. The Austrian participants drew no distinction between the two subtypes of the manipulated news report as concerns spotting manipulation, however a higher number of participants accepted the standpoint of the news report allegedly taken from a 'traditional' Internet news source. Hence, there was a difference in perception of the manipulated news report as to spotting manipulation and accepting the standpoint the news report promoted depending on the type of Internet news sources, traditional or alternative, where the news report was allegedly taken from. A more detailed account of the issue will be given in the Conclusions.

Finally, *Exploratory Question 4* asked whether there was a relationship between more intensive Internet use by participants for getting news of any kind and spotting manipulated media information as well as accepting the standpoint the manipulated news report promoted. To answer this question, a logistic regression test was run with the *"Online sources use in a typical week for getting news"* question as an explanatory variable and the *spotting binomial scale* and *placing responsibility-recoded* question as outcome variables for the manipulated news report condition. The analysis revealed no relationship in any sample between online sources use in a typical week and spotting manipulated information for both subtypes of the manipulated news report combined as well as for each of them taken separately. However, I found a significant positive relationship ($p < 0.05$) between 'online sources use in a typical week' and 'placing responsibility' in the Austrian sample (Table 67). As one can see, the relationship might be interpreted as follows: those who used online sources for getting news more often, more likely accepted the standpoint of the manipulated news report (the odds ratios are 1.25 greater, or, in other words, 25% more).

Table 67. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting *'placing responsibility'* from *'online sources use in a typical week for getting news'* (for both subtypes of the manipulated news report, by country)

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Online sources use for news	-.184	.123	.832	.134
	Constant	*.859*	*.791*	*2.361*	*.278*
Austrian	Online sources use for news	.222	.104	1.249	.032
	Constant	*-1.225*	*.631*	*.294*	*.052*
Italian	Online sources use for news	-.134	.116	.875	.252
	Constant	*1.085*	*.660*	*2.958*	*.101*

When the two subtypes of the manipulated news report were analyzed separately, the significant relationship between the variables was found only for the 'traditional' one (Table 68).

Table 68. Summary of logistic regression analysis predicting *'placing responsibility'* from *'online sources use in a typical week for getting news'* (for 'traditional' subtype of the manipulated news report, by country)

Condition	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
Dutch	Online sources use for news	-.239	.180	.788	.185
	Constant	*.999*	*1.174*	*2.716*	*.395*
Austrian	Online sources use for news	.464	.203	1.591	.022
	Constant	*-2.500*	*1.289*	*.082*	*.052*
Italian	Online sources use for news	-.376	.241	.686	.119
	Constant	*2.906*	*1.422*	*18.283*	*.041*

Thus those who used online sources more often, had odds ratios of 1.6 greater (or 60% more) for accepting the standpoint the 'traditional' subtype of the manipulated news report promoted,

as compared to those whose use of online sources was rarer. No effects of gender or department affiliation were found. Consequently, the answer to the *Exploratory Question 4* is positive with respect to accepting the standpoint of the 'traditional' subtype of the manipulated news report by the Austrian participants. The reasons behind the results warrant further investigation.

Below is the summary table (Table 69) on the Hypotheses and Exploratory Questions with regard to the target group of participants aged 18-26 years.

Table 69. Summary of the outcomes of the study Hypotheses and Exploratory Questions

Hypotheses and Exploratory Questions (EQs)	Concise description	Outcomes
Hypothesis 1	*The higher the political competence level of individuals, the more likely manipulated media information will be spotted*	Not supported
Hypothesis 2	*The higher the political competence level is, the less likely the standpoint of the manipulated news report will be accepted*	Not supported
Hypothesis 3	*Manipulated media information will more likely be spotted in countries with a more advanced media literacy context*	Supported/partially supported
Hypothesis 4	*Those who spot manipulation in the news report will not accept the standpoint the news report promotes.*	Supported for the Dutch and the Austrian samples
EQ 1	*Is there a relationship between a country media literacy context and informed media mistrust?*	Positive
EQ 2	*Is there a relationship between political competence and informed media mistrust?*	Negative
EQ 3	*Is there a difference between perception of 'traditional' and 'alternative' subtypes of the manipulated news report as to spotting manipulation and accepting the standpoint?*	Positive
EQ 4	*Is there a relationship between online sources use in a typical week for getting news and spotting manipulated media information as well as accepting its standpoint?*	Positive for the Austrian sample

PART 2. The Italian sample

In this study, the target group in each of the three countries included persons aged 18-26 years - the category that is usually referred to as the 'heaviest Internet users'. However, the Italian sample afforded an opportunity to compare three age categories - 18-26, 27-35, and 36≤ year olds - on major points: individual levels of political competence as well as its role in spotting manipulated media information and accepting / rejecting the standpoint(s) the information promotes. Besides, some other key points were compared across the three age categories of the Italian sample. In this part, only principal data and statistical results are displayed. Additional statistical data on the Italian sample can be found in Appendix D.

The Italian sample consisted of 394 participants in total. Of those, 237 participants were in the age category of 19-26 years old, 85 participants were in the age category of 27-35 years old, and 72 participants were in the age category of 36≤ years old (the oldest participants was aged 59). Table 70 below provided data on participant age.

Table 70. Age of the participants of the Italian sample (by age category; total N = 394)

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*22*	*30*	*43,4*
Md	*22*	*30*	*43*
SD	*2*	*2,7*	*5,5*
N	**237**	**85**	**72**

The number of participants in the Italian sample by age group assigned to read different types/subtypes of the news reports is shown below in Table 71, and summary statistics on the age of the participants according to the news report type/subtype is demonstrated in Table 72.

Table 71. Number of participants assigned to different types and subtypes of news reports by age category

Age category	Balanced report			Manipulated report			TOTAL
	BT	BA	*Total*	MT	MA	*Total*	
19 - 26 y.o.	68	57	***125***	40	72	***112***	**237**
27 - 35 y.o.	20	22	***42***	19	24	***43***	**85**
36 ≤ y.o.	16	19	***35***	17	20	***37***	**72**

Table 72. Summary statistics on participants' ages according to different types and subtypes of news reports by age category

Age category	Balanced report			Manipulated report			TOTAL
	BT	**BA**	***Total***	**MT**	**MA**	***Total***	**TOTAL**
19 - 26 y.o.	*X* = 22,2 Md. = 22 SD = 2,0	*X* = 22,5 Md. = 22 SD = 2,2	***X = 22,3*** ***Md. = 22*** ***SD = 2,1***	*X* = 21,4 Md. = 21 SD = 1,8	*X* = 21,8 Md. = 21,5 SD = 2,0	***X = 21,6*** ***Md. = 21*** ***SD = 1,9***	**X = 22** **Md. = 22** **SD = 2,1**
27 - 35 y.o.	*X* = 31 Md. = 31 SD = 2,6	*X* = 30,4 Md. = 30 SD = 2,8	***X = 30,5*** ***Md. = 30*** ***SD = 2,7***	*X* = 29,7 Md. = 29 SD = 2,6	*X* = 30,2 Md. = 30 SD = 2,8	***X = 30,1*** ***Md. = 30*** ***SD = 2,7***	**X = 30,3** **Md. = 30** **SD = 2,7**
36 ≤ y.o.	*X* = 42,6 Md. = 40,5 SD = 5,1	*X* = 43,2 Md. = 40 SD = 6,1	***X = 43*** ***Md. = 40*** ***SD = 5,6***	*X* = 42,6 Md. = 43 SD = 4,6	*X* = 45,1 Md. = 45 SD = 6,1	***X = 43,9*** ***Md. = 44*** ***SD = 5,5***	**X = 43,4** **Md. = 43** **SD = 5,5**

As is seen, age is quite comparable across the news report conditions within the age categories of 18-26 and 27-35 years old. However, in the age groups of 36 ≤ years old, in particular as to the 'manipulated' condition, there is some misfit with regard to participants' ages.

4.5. Main explanatory variable - Political Competence

The descriptive data on the components on the *political competence scale* showed that the participants in the age category of 36 years and older overall demonstrated higher scores compared to the other two age categories. By gender, there were no significant differences: males were only slightly more active in getting political information, participating in certain types of political sctivities and possessing factual political knowledge. For details please see Appendix D.

Participants aged 36 years and older scored the highest on the *political competence scale* (Table 73). Histograms and box plots for each age category are shown in Appendix D.

Table 73. Summary statistics of *political competence scale* by age group

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*17,1*	*18,0*	*21,0*
Md	*17,0*	*17,0*	*21,0*
SD	*5,9*	*6,3*	*5,3*
Min.	*1*	*5*	*6*
Max.	*32*	*32*	*33*
Range	*31*	*27*	*27*
N	**221**	**81**	**64**

With respect to gender, males scored higher than females on the *political competence scale* (see Appendix D for further details).

4.6. Outcome variables (*and questions inextricably associated with them)*

Given that the age category of 19-26 years old was analyzed in Part I of this chapter and the number of participants in the other two age categories is not comparable to the first one, responses to the following questions are compared according to the two types or versions of the news reports - 'balanced' and manipulated', without their subdivision into the subtypes. In the process of analysis, no striking meaningful differences worth noting were found between perception of different subtypes of the news reports by participants in the age categories of 27-35 and 36 ≤ years old.

4.6.1. Measuring the importance of the topic of the news reports and their understandability

The great majority of participants in all age groups considered the news reports as important. Moreover, the manipulated version is regarded as far more important compared to the balanced one. In regard to the 'understandability' question, again, the great majority of participants in all age categories viewed the descriptions of the situations in the news report as easy to understand. In addition, the participants in the age category of 27-35 years old evaluated both 'balanced' and 'manipulated' versions similarly. However, in two other age categories a higher percentage of participants regarded the 'balanced' one as less 'understandable' compared to the 'manipulated' news report, which makes sense as the situation is described from various points of view. For detailed numbers of percent distribution, please see Appendix D.

4.6.2. First outcome variable - Spotting Manipulated Media Information

A. Questions measured spotting manipulated information

Fact-basedness, balance, allegation-loadedness of the news reports and overall trust in it were measured by original questions with four ordinal response options: 'definitely no', rather no', rather yes', 'definitely yes'. Then these response options were recoded so that to take the form of the binary response options 'yes/no' (as was explained in the previous chapter, 'definitely no' and 'rather no' were summed up as well as 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes'). Here are shown percent distributions of responses to the recoded questions measured spotting manipulated information. Information on percent distribution of responses to the original questions, with four ordinal response options, measured spotting manipulated information can be found in Appendix D.

1) Responses to the question about 'fact-basedness' demonstrated that the great majority of the participants in all age categories considered the news reports as fact-based. In addition, if the 'balanced' one was estimated as so by more than 70% of the participants in each age category, the percentage rose to more than 80% in respect of the 'manipulated' version of the news report (Table 74).

Table 74. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*79,9*	*89,2*	*75,6*	*86,0*	*71,4*	*86,5*
No	*20,1*	*10,8*	*24,4*	*14,0*	*28,6*	*13,5*
TOTAL, N	**124**	**111**	**41**	**43**	**35**	**37**

2) Responses to the question about 'balance' showed that the 'manipulated' version of the news report was viewed as even more balanced compared to the 'balanced' one in all age categories. Moreover, the participants in the age category of 19-26 years old appeared to have the highest percentage among the three age categories of persons who regarded the 'manipulated' type as unbalanced (Table 75).

Table 75. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*66,2*	*66,7*	*54,7*	*71,5*	*60,0*	*70,3*
No	*33,8*	*33,3*	*45,3*	*28,5*	*40,0*	*29,7*
TOTAL, N	**124**	**111**	**42**	**42**	**35**	**37**

3) Responses to the question about 'allegation-loadedness' showed that the majority of participants in the age categories of 19-26 and 27-35 and the great majority in the age category of 36 ≤ years old viewed the 'manipulated' version of the news report as free from allegations (Table 76).

Table 76. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*48,4*	*58,2*	*45,3*	*57,1*	*57,1*	*75,0*
No	*51,6*	*41,8*	*54,7*	*41,9*	*42,8*	*25,0*
TOTAL, N	**124**	**110**	**42**	**43**	**35**	**36**

4) Responses to the question about 'overall trust' showed that the majority of the participants in the age categories of 19-26 and 36 ≤ years old trusted the 'balanced' version of the news report, whereas the opinions of those in the age category of 27-35 years old were split in half. However, when it came to the 'manipulated' type, the percentage of those who trusted rose 17% in the age category of 19-26 years old, almost 20% in the age category of 27-35 years old and 10% in the age category of 36 ≤ years old (Table 77). Thus, the 'manipulated' version of the news report was regarded as more trustworthy, compared to the 'balanced', in all age categories.

Table 77. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Yes	*62,8*	*79,0*	*50,0*	*71,8*	*68,6*	*78,4*
No	*37,2*	*21,0*	*50,0*	*30,2*	*31,4*	*21,6*
TOTAL, N	**121**	**110**	**42**	**43**	**35**	**37**

B. Ordinal and binomial spotting scales of four questions

Ordinal scale

All questions in the scale were positively correlated at $p < 0.01$ for all age categories. Cronbach's alpha was 0,76 for the age category of 19-26 years old; 0.86 for the age category of 27-35 years old and 0.78 for the age category of 36 ≤ years old. For further details see Appendix D.

Summary statistics for both versions of the news report are comparable across age categories with each of the conditions - 'balanced' and 'manipulated' . Mean and median values lie in between the values of '2', which itself means that the news report is rather not fact-based, balanced, free of allegations and trustworthy, and '3', which itself means that the news report is still rather fact-based, balanced, allegation-free and trustworthy. However, these average values are closer to '3', and, specifically, this refers to the manipulated version of the news report, which means it was evaluated as rather not manipulated. Table 78 provides details of percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale*.

Table 78. Summary statistics for the *ordinal spotting scale* according to the type of news report by age category

	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
spotscale4	*M* = 2,7 Md = 2,7 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,8 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,6 Md = 2,5 SD = 0,6	*M* = 2,8 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,7 Md = 2,7 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,8 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,4
TOTAL, *N*	**121**	**110**	**41**	**42**	**35**	**36**

Binomial scale

Transformation of the *ordinal spotting scale* consisted of four questions (*spotscale4*) into a binomial 'spotting/non-spotting' scale (combining 'definitely no' and 'rather no' response options under the name of 'spotting', and 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes' response options under the name of 'non-spotting') brought the following results (Table 79). In other words, only participants who answered 'no' to all the four questions were regarded as those who spotted manipulation, whereas all the others - just as much persons who answered 'yes' to all the four questions as those who answered 'no' to less than four questions - were considered as those who had not spotted manipulated information.

Table 79. Distribution of participant responses on the *binomial spotting scale* (by age category)

Binomial response options	**19-26 years old**		**27-35 years old**		**36 ≤ years old**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Non-spotting, %	*90,1%*	*91,8%*	*80,5%*	*92,9%*	*88,6%*	*91,7%*
(*N*)	*(109)*	*(101)*	*(33)*	*(39)*	*(31)*	*(33)*
Spotting, %	*9,9%*	*8,2%*	*19,5%*	*7,1%*	*11,4%*	*8,3%*
(*N*)	*(12)*	*(9)*	*(8)*	*(3)*	*(4)*	*(3)*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
(*N*)	**(*121*)**	**(*110*)**	**(*41*)**	**(*42*)**	**(*35*)**	**(*36*)**

As is seen from the table, more than 90% of the participants in each age category were not able to spot manipulation in the manipulated news report, which is not surprising given that the same majority regarded the news report as fact-based, balanced (that is, not one-sided), free from allegations and overall trustworthy. Detailed information on the percentage of 'non-spotting' compared to 'spotting' in participant responses on the *binomial spotting scale* can be found in Appendix D.

4.6.3. Second outcome variable - Accepting Manipulated News Report Standpoint, or who should be blamed for the situation

Again, two questions aimed at revealing whether participants, first, understood or not the standpoint(s) a particular news report promoted and, second, whether they personally accepted or not the standpoint(s) specifically of the manipulated version of the news report. The standpoint(s) implied placing responsibility for the death(s) of protester(s) that was

described in the news reports. The first of the two questions, read *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"*, had four response options: definitely yes, rather yes, rather no, definitely no. The percentage distribution of participants' responses to the question by age category are shown in Table 80 in binary 'yes/no' form (response options 'definitely yes' and 'rather yes' were combined under 'yes', and 'definitely no' and rather no' were combined under 'no').

Table 80. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* (by age category)

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
YES, %	*33,9%*	*53,6%*	*35,7%*	*39,5%*	*25,7%*	*51,4%*
(*N*)	*(82)*	*(59)*	*(15)*	*(17)*	*(9)*	*(19)*
NO, %	*66,2%*	*46,4%*	*64,3%*	*60,5%*	*74,3%*	*48,6%*
(*N*)	*(42)*	*(51)*	*(27)*	*(26)*	*(26)*	*(18)*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
(*N*)	**(*124*)**	**(*110*)**	**(*42*)**	**(*43*)**	**(*35*)**	**(*37*)**

As is seen from the table, the majority of participants in all age categories noted that it was not clear from the 'balanced' reports who is responsible (as was assumed, for different points of view on the situation were presented in the 'balanced' news report). As to its 'manipulated' version, a somewhat higher percent of the participants in the age category of 19-26 years old said it was clear, while a considerably higher percentage of the participants in the age category of 27-35 stated just the opposite. In the age category of 36 ≤ years old opinions were split in half on the issue.

The second question asked *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* (the underlining was used in the study questionnaire) and contained four response options: protesters, police, president, unclear. Participants were allowed to select more than one response option, which, in turn, was also intended to help clarify any possibly ambiguous results of the previous question. Percentage distribution of responses by age category is shown in Table 81.

Table 81. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* according to the two versions of the news report (by age category)

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Protesters	*5,0*	*2,7*	*9,8*	-	*5,9*	-
Police	*13,2*	*21,8*	*14,6*	*20,9*	*14,7*	*29,7*
President	*14,9*	*35,5*	*4,9*	*32,6*	*2,9*	*29,7*
President and police	*0,8*	*1,8*	*2,4*	-	-	-
Protesters and police	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protesters and president	-	-	-	-	-	-
All of them	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unclear	*66,1*	*38,2*	*68,3*	*46,5*	*76,5*	*40,5*
TOTAL, % (*N*)	**100% (*121*)**	**100% (*110*)**	**100% (*41*)**	**100% (*43*)**	**100% (*34*)**	**100% (*37*)**

Conspicuously, a clearly higher percentage of the participants in all age categories could not definitely place responsibility on anyone after reading the 'balanced' version of the news report - for that reason, the majority chose the 'unclear' response option. However, regarding the 'manipulated' version of the news report, the percentage of those who responded 'unclear' was reduced by more than a half. In addition, the majority in all age categories accepted the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report, with the age categories of 19-26 and 36 ≤ years old demonstrated the higher percentage of those accepted.

Thus, given that in the manipulated version of the news report the responsibility for the participants death(s) was allegedly assigned to police and/or president, those participants who chose such response options as 'police', 'president' or both were considered as persons who accepted the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report. As a result, the response options were recoded respectively into a binary form - 'accepting/non-accepting'. The recoded question for placing responsibility with the two categorical values gave the following results for the manipulated news report (Table 82).

Table 82. Percent distribution of participant responses to the recoded question *"Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?"* with regard to the manipulated type of the news report by age category

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	N	***%***	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***
Non-accepting standpoint	*45*	*40,9%*	*20*	*46,5%*	*15*	*40,6%*
Accepting standpoint	*65*	*59,1%*	*23*	*53,5%*	*22*	*59,4%*
TOTAL, N (%)	**110**	**100%**	**43**	**100%**	**37**	**100%**

4.7. Measurement participant attitudes toward the scene of action of the news report - Republic of Moldova

Overall attitudes toward Moldova were comparable across the three age categories and were unfavorable (or rather unfavorable). Percent distribution and other statistics on participants attitudes toward Moldova can be found in Appendix D.

4.8. Statistical tests on effects of political competence on outcome variables and peculiarities of accepting the standpoint of the manipulated news reports in three age groups of the Italian sample

The Italian sample afforded the opportunity to compare possible effects of individual political competence on outcome variables across three different age groups, as well as to test possible peculiarities of accepting/rejecting the standpoint of the manipulated news reports in these groups. Therefore, the statistical tests were focused primarily on the above mentioned major points. The result of the tests are described below. Additional information on correlations for the Italian sample can be found in Appendix D.

4.8.1. Logistic regression analysis with political competence scale as an explanatory variable and binomial spotting scale as an outcome variable

The logistic regression test with *political competence* scale as an explanatory variable and *binomial spotting scale* as an outcome variable brought non-significant results for each age category. When components of the *political competence scale* were entered as explanatory variables one by one, only *'political discussions in a typical week'* was significant at $p < 0.05$ for the age category of 19-26 years old (Table 83).

Table 83. Summary of logistic regression analysis for predicting spotting on a binomial scale from *political discussions,* by age category (the manipulated news report)

Condition (age group)	***Explanatory variable***	***B***	***SE***	***Odds ratio***	***p***
19-26	Political discussions	.547	.277	1.727	.048
	Constant	*-3.511*	*.737*	*.030*	*.000*
27-35	Political discussion	.279	.529	1.322	.597
	Constant	*-3.073*	*1.203*	*.046*	*.011*
36-60	Political discussion	.600	.636	1.823	.346
	Constant	*-4.021*	*1.974*	*.018*	*.042*

In other words, those participants, aged 19-26 years, who more actively participated in political discussions in a typical week were more likely to spot manipulation in the news report ($\chi^2 = 3.92$, $df = 1$, $N = 110$, $p < 0.05$). .

4.8.2. Logistic regression analysis with political competence scale as an explanatory variable and placing responsibility/accepting standpoint recoded question as an outcome variable

The logistic regression test with *political competence* scale as an explanatory variable and the *placing responsibility/accepting standpoint* categorical question as an outcome variable brought non-significant results for each age category. When components of the *political competence scale* were entered as explanatory variables one by one, only *'factual political knowledge* scale' was significant at $p < 0.05$ for the age category of 36 ≤ years old (Table 84).

Table 84. Summary of logistic regression analysis for predicting *'placing responsibility/accepting standpoint'* from *factual political knowledge* scale by age category (the manipulated news report)

Condition (age group)	*Explanatory variable*	*B*	*SE*	*Odds ratio*	*p*
19-26	Factual political knowledge scale	-.125	.137	.882	.362
	Constant	*.841*	*.538*	*2.318*	*.118*
27-35	Factual political knowledge scale	.091	.208	1.095	.661
	Constant	*-.180*	*.806*	*.836*	*.824*
36-60	Factual political knowledge scale	.694	.327	2.002	.034
	Constant	*-2.461*	*1.348*	*.085*	*.068*

Stated differently, the higher the factual political knowledge of the participants in the mentioned age category, the more likely that they accepted the standpoint(s) the manipulated news report promoted ($\chi^2 = 5.57$, $df = 1$, $N = 37$, $p < 0.05$).

All other variables, such as *informed media mistrust scale*, *age*, *gender*, *online news sources use in a typical week*, and *Internet news sources trustworthiness*, were non significant when tested in logistic regression.

4.8.3. Chi-square tests for independence for questions "Is it clear who is responsible" and "On whom you personally place the responsibility"

When chi-square test for independence was performed within manipulated condition for the questions *"Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?"* and *"Please indicate on whom you personally place responsibility for the deaths described?"*, both transformed into ones having binary responses ('yes/no' for the former and 'accepting/non-accepting' for the latter), the results were significant for all age categories. In particular, for the age category 19-26 years old the result was χ^2(df = 1, N = 110) = 30.22, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.524; for the age category of 27-35 years old the result was χ^2(df = 1, N = 43) = 13.64, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.563; and for the age category of 36 ≤ years old the result was χ^2(df = 1, N = 37) = 14.60, p <0.001, Phi value is 0.628.

Thus, the results suggest that a positive association of high strength exists in all age

categories between understanding who is named responsible for the death(s) of the protester(s) in the manipulated news report and placing responsibility personally by the study participants. In other words, those of the participants who were unclear on the assignment of responsibility in the news report it was unlikely that they accepted the standpoint(s) the manipulated news report promoted. And vice versa: those of the participants who responded that it was clear who was responsible were more likely accepted the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report. Table 85 below demonstrates the results.

Table 85. Chi-square test for independence between questions *'is it clear who is responsible'* and *'placing responsibility'*, by age category (the manipulated news report)

AGE CATEGORY	Placing responsibility		Is it clear who is responsible for the death(s) described		TOTAL
			NO	YES	
19-26 YEARS OLD	Non-accepting standpoint	N	35	10	***45***
		%	*68,6%*	*16,9%*	***40,9%***
		Adjusted residuals	5,5	- 5,5	
	Accepting standpoint	N	16	49	***65***
		%	*31,4%*	*83,1%*	***59,1%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 5,5	5,5	
	TOTAL	***N***	***51***	***59***	**110**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**
27-35 YEARS OLD	Non-accepting standpoint	N	18	2	***20***
		%	*69,2%*	*11,8%*	***46,5%***
		Adjusted residuals	3,7	- 3,7	
	Accepting standpoint	N	8	15	***23***
		%	*30,8%*	*88,2%*	***53,5%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 3,7	3,7	
	TOTAL	***N***	***26***	***17***	**43**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**
36 ≤ YEARS OLD	Non-accepting standpoint	N	13	2	***15***
		%	*72,2%*	*10,5%*	***40,5%***
		Adjusted residuals	3,8	- 3,8	
	Accepting standpoint	N	5	17	***22***
		%	*27,8%*	*89,5%*	***59,5%***
		Adjusted residuals	- 3,8	3,8	
	TOTAL	***N***	***18***	***19***	**37**
		%	***100%***	***100%***	**100%**

4.8.4. Chi-square tests for independence for the binomial spotting scale and accepting the standpoint question

The results of the chi-square test for independence were non-significant for all age categories. Consequently, no association exists between spotting manipulation and accepting the standpoint(s) the manipulated news report promotes.

4.9. Summary

The analysis did not reveal significant differences between the three age categories as to spotting manipulated media information and accepting the standpoint(s) it promoted: more than 90% of the participants in each age category did not spot the manipulation and about 60% in the age categories of 19-26 and 36 ≤ years old and 53.5% of the participants in the age category of 27-35 years old accepted the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report. Although those in the age category of 36 ≤ years old scored higher on the *political competence scale* as well as on the majority of its components compared to the other two age categories, the overall level of political competence appeared to be inefficient as to revealing manipulation in a news report and rejecting an unsubstantiated viewpoint that the news report introduced; as statistical tests showed, there were moderate-to-strong significant associations between who was blamed in the news report and who the majority of participants in each age category blamed subsequently. At the same time, when the components of the *political competence scale* were tested separately, participation in political discussions was positively predictive of spotting manipulation in the age group of 27-35 years old, while in the age category of 36 ≤ years old possessing more factual political knowledge was also positively predictive of accepting the standpoint of the manipulated news report. This last incomprehensible finding warrants further investigation. Thus, the expected moderating effects of 'age' made no difference as concerns the participants of the Italian sample in this particular study.

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS

In this study I investigated the roles of individual political competence and media literacy context as applied to (1) spotting manipulated media information in Internet news coverage of a new foreign issue as well as to (2) accepting the standpoint(s) of the manipulated news report. In addition, the effects of informed media mistrust and perception of different subtypes of the manipulated news report were explored.

Perhaps, the most puzzling finding in the study appeared to be that *political competence did not have any effect* on spotting manipulated media information as well as accepting its standpoint(s). In other words, when it comes to encountering manipulated media information focused on a novel issue, more politically competent citizens perceive the information in the same way as their less politically competent counterparts do. In addition, this finding is as true for the target group of participants aged 18-26 years old in each of the three countries, as for each and every age category of participants from the Italian sample. With regard to the latter, although those who belonged to the 'oldest' age category of 36 ≤ scored the highest on political competence as well as the majority of its components, participants in all of the age categories - 18-26, 27-35 and 36 ≤ - still showed quite the same outcomes: overall level of political competence appeared to be inefficient as to revealing manipulation in a news report and rejecting an unsubstantiated viewpoint introduced by the news report. Thus the expected moderating effects of 'age' made no difference, at least, as concerns the participants of the Italian sample in this thesis research.

More than this, none of the six components of the political competence scale affected spotting/accepting when tested separately. In fact, only for those in the Italian sample aged 27-35 years old was more frequent participation in political discussions positively predictive of spotting manipulation. However, for the target age category, neither frequency of intentional consumption of political news, nor participation in political discussions, nor challenging an opponent's political standpoints, nor factual political knowledge - that, hypothetically, might have played especially significant roles - showed any effect on spotting/accepting. Furthermore, in the Dutch sample, the results demonstrated that the less the participants were interested in politics and the less they intentionally consumed political news and the less factual knowledge they demonstrated, then the more they were able to spot manipulation in the news report allegedly taken from 'traditional' Internet news sources. These findings, related to political competence, might be indicative of at least two significant

aspects.

1) First, political competence as such might have no impact at all on the critical assessment of media information in respect to spotting manipulation in news reports and resisting their standpoints, meaning that both politically competent and politically incompetent individuals are equally susceptible to the media manipulation effects. Put differently, both types of individuals might similarly be softly persuaded by manipulated news which covers a novel, unfamiliar issue. In a definite way, this result contradicts the inferences previously drawn by a number of scholars that more politically competent people can more deeply process news, are better at interpreting new information, are more resistant to persuasive messages, and can infer more accurate conclusions from political communications (see, for one, Fiske et al., 1990; Krosnick, 1990; Hsu & Price, 1993; Nelson et al., 1997; Rhee & Capella, 1997; Guo and Moy, 1998). Nevertheless, some reservations should be made with respect to this. In particular, the conclusions from previous studies did not refer to effects of manipulated news on novel issues, and thus this cannot be considered in such context as a total inconsistency. Also, representative samples of participants might bring somewhat different results as to the effects of political competence on the perception of manipulated news. However, despite providing this kind of external validity, to get just the reverse outcome from the representative samples seems rather unlikely, for the general pattern can be revealed even with convenience samples of sufficient size, which have high internal validity, as was the case in this research, which, moreover, was tested in several contexts (countries).

The further verification as to whether the level of political competence does or does not make an individual more resistant to the persuasive effects of manipulated media information, requires the employment in future studies of news messages on various topics, coming from various channels of communication (Internet, TV, print). This approach is expected to clarify in more detail whether manipulated news covering different political, international, economic, social, etc. issues, having a different format and received from different news channels, have any similar impact on politically competent / incompetent individuals. Incorporating the element of personal interest in an issue covered by the news report would further be expected to advance the understanding when the standpoints of manipulated news reports are accepted at face value (say, when there is no or minor interest in the issue) and also when the standpoints are challenged, assessed critically (say, when the interest in the issue is high). All this is aimed at figuring out what feature, if any, of a manipulated news message on an unfamiliar issue makes individuals assess it critically depending on their levels of political competence.

2) Second, the lack of effects of the components of political competence on outcome variables in the Austrian and Italian samples further indicates that the concept of political competence should be refined and updated when it is employed to predict the critical assessment of news media information and, in particular, the manipulated one. As to the seemingly 'illogical' findings from the Dutch sample as well as those found in the Italian participants aged 36 ≤ - when those who had more factual political knowledge were more likely to accept the standpoint of the manipulated news report - it might be conceivable that the frequent consumption of political information from the news media, as a consequence of the higher interest in politics and a prerequisite for the subsequent higher level of factual political knowledge, contributes to a more 'rigid' rather than flexible reasoning about the quality of other information coming from the media. Stated differently, the more frequently political media information is consumed, the more rigid become the frameworks within which every other piece of political media information is considered and evaluated, and the more likely the frameworks will be applied to information that is novel or scarcely familiar to news consumers. Thus, if a 'political news junkie', who is used to consuming political information which is often based on one-sided opinions bordering on allegations, encounters some information on a topic novel to him or her but which is presented in a one-sided opinion/allegation fashion, then it is very likely that such information will also be judged as 'normal', and not biased or manipulated. In this way, he or she might also become susceptible to the effects of that information, something that was stated repeatedly in the literature (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007a; Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Nevertheless, the theoretical assumptions presented above, as to a relationship between interest in politics, frequency of intentional consumption of political information from the news media, amount of factual political knowledge and critical assessment of news media (manipulated) information, warrant further investigation. Another potentially valuable aspect that should be taken into account in future studies with student or young adults samples is a 'parental factor'. This means that parent's educational background, occupation and income might have affected the children's political socialization, literacy, preferences, knowledge and, eventually, competence. For this reason, it is instructive to control the aforementioned factor, either.

With regard to the second explanatory variable in the study, media literacy context, I found that participants from the countries ranked higher in terms of media literacy context, namely Austria and the Netherlands, were better able to spot manipulated information, and after the spotting, not to accept its standpoint(s) than were participants from Italy, which was ranked the lowest among the three countries. Notwithstanding that in spotting/accepting the

standpoint(s) the Austrian participants demonstrated somewhat higher scores compared to the Dutch participants, the general trend makes sense.

In any case, the critical assessment of media messages as a component of individual media literacy was not measured in this study. Hence, hypothetically, some other specific features of the three countries might have contributed to the differing results as to the influence of media literacy context: for instance, due to the difference in media systems models. According to those models, Italy, which was ranked the lowest of the three countries on media literacy context, belongs to the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model, while the Netherlands and Austria pertain to the North/Central Europe or Democratic Corporatist Model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). So, theoretically, despite the fact that these models were not incorporated into the study design, the results of the Italian participants might have been inferior to the results of the Dutch and Austrian participants because of belonging to the different media system model.

Nevertheless, distinguishing between manipulated and non-manipulated media messages is an integral part of critical assessment, critical processing or critical understanding of media messages which, in turn, is a component of general media literacy. This specific integral part of the critical understanding was measured neither in the "Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels" (2009) nor in the "Study on Testing and Refining Criteria to Assess Media Literacy Levels in Europe" (2011). However, other indicators, including indicators measuring the critical understanding component, allowed ranking the mentioned countries according to levels of critical understanding and overall media literacy context, both of which were congruent for all the three countries. It is probable that if the indicators of spotting/accepting were incorporated into those Studies (2009, 2011), Austria and the Netherlands would have ranked differently specifically on the indicators, but the whole picture would had likely remained the same. For this reason, the hypothesized and proven effect of the media literacy context of a particular country on spotting / rejecting the manipulation in a news report should be considered valid until disproved by alternative evidence.

Therefore, and specifically in the foregoing regard, future research should employ representative samples for making externally valid inferences from media literacy context on a country level as well as include in their measurement a set of questions verifying the critical assessment component of media literacy on an individual level. In that way, the relationship between the media literacy context at country level and spotting / rejecting manipulated media information, demonstrated in the thesis, might be either substantiated or refuted.

Two other significant study findings, which may also provide directions for future research, are related to (1) an 'incoherent' relationship between spotting manipulation in a news report and still accepting its standpoint, and (2) a moderating role of a type of the Internet news sources (traditional or alternative) in regarding manipulated news reports as trustworthy.

With respect to the former, it seems quite logical that those who can spot manipulation are also expected to reject the standpoint(s) promoted in the manipulated news report, concerning in this particular case, the unambiguous placing of responsibility. However, in reality, in each of the three samples of those who spotted manipulation, some percentage of people still accepted the report's viewpoint as to who should be blamed. Moreover, again in each of the three samples, of those who did not spot manipulation some percentage - less than half in the Austrian and the Italian samples and slightly more than half in the Dutch sample - still rejected the promoted standpoint(s) as to decisively placing the responsibility.

These outcomes raise, at least, three questions. First, what are the reasons for accepting the standpoint of the news information by persons who a moment ago had expressed their total mistrust toward it? Second, which one of the two, spotting or accepting the standpoint, might better characterize a person's skills in the critical assessment of manipulated media information? Third, should these two components, spotting and accepting the standpoint, be necessarily considered as interrelated? To answer them, additional focused research is needed. Although, from the theoretical point of view, and being supported by the aforementioned results, it might be assumed that subscribing to a news report's standpoint does not always coincide with viewing that news report as balanced, fact-based, and overall trustworthy, on account of considering just the opposite features of news messages (such as one-sidedness and allegation-loadedness) as being the norm rather than not. In other words, one can spot manipulation but considers it to be the ordinary run of things in news reporting, while another person cannot see any signs of manipulation due, again, to regarding those as normal properties. For this reason, it is not unlikely that spotting manipulation and rejecting the standpoint might not resonate in low media literate persons but, at the same time, be congruent in those who have higher media literacy knowledge and skills. This is particularly the case when it comes to the necessity of observance in news reports of commonly shared journalistic principles of truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, impartiality, fairness and public accountability. Therefore, the seemingly strange picture of the relationships between spotting manipulation and accepting the standpoint(s) might find its explanation in differences in individual media literacy levels. Nevertheless, this is only a theoretical assumption and more

sophisticated methods of research are needed, including interviews or/and focus groups, to learn about the relationships between the mentioned two components and the reasons underlying the evaluation of the manipulated media information (spotting/non-spotting) as well as the decision to subscribe to or reject the standpoint(s) it promotes.

Another attention-grabbing finding is related to the concept of informed media mistrust. It was initially expected that higher media literacy context should be associated with lower general media trust, as some research before found (see for example, Craft et al., 2013). However, the finding appeared to be here just the contrary: the higher a particular country was ranked on media literacy context, the higher general media trust demonstrated participants from that country. And while the difference between media trust/media mistrust was negligible in the Italian participants, the same difference was significant for the Austrian and, especially, the Dutch participants. At first thought, such outcomes look questionable and inconsistent with the very idea of media literacy, because those who are used to trusting the news media are usually said to be less educated and in possessing poor critical thinking skills when it comes to evaluating news media messages (Tsfati & Ariely, 2013). However, the university students can hardly fall into the category of the 'less educated'. Thus the explanation should be different. It is possible, in particular, that media trust was, according to Tsfati and Ariely (2013), "positively and rather highly correlated with trust in democracy" (p.2). Following this logic, of the three samples, the Dutch participants had the highest level of trust in democracy, followed by the Austrian and the Italian. Yet, the trust in democracy was not measured in this study, so no conclusive evidence in respect to this assumption can be provided. Also, the positive correlation of media trust with media literacy context found in this study may be explained by the peculiarities of media market in a particular country, that is, when the news media reports are rather usually trusted than not. Moreover, there was no specification in the questions measured general news media trust as to whether they referred to so-called mainstream news media or various new media. Given that, it is quite possible that a part of the study participants, when answered the questions on general media trust, implied the mainstream and another part of the study participants meant the new media. Unfortunately, any of the proposed explanations does not still clarify entirely the issue of the relationship between the critical evaluation of news media information, the informed media mistrust and media literacy context. The resolution of this puzzling issue warrants further investigation.

Lastly, no less intriguing is the finding of the moderating role of a type of the Internet news sources in regarding the manipulated news report as trustworthy. In this vein, the Dutch

participants regarded the manipulated news report that allegedly came from the 'alternative' Internet news sources as more trustworthy and, thus, spotting manipulation in it to a lesser degree and accepting its standpoint(s) to a greater degree. In turn, the Austrian and, even to a greater degree, the Italian participants trusted more the news report that allegedly was taken from the 'traditional' Internet news sources. These particularities indicate in practical terms which type of Internet news sources in which country might likely be recognized as more / less trustworthy by young people. In addition, the puzzle becomes more intricate if we go back to the study question about the trustworthiness of these two types of Internet news sources: the Dutch, the Italians and the Austrians then judged the 'alternative' ones as less trustworthy when compared to the 'traditional'.

In light of the foregoing, the following preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Since the 'alternative' Internet news sources were regarded as those more likely to spread untrustworthy information, the opting for the 'traditional' Internet news sources as those which transmit more reliable information seems quite natural on the part of the Austrian and Italian participants. From this perspective, when they believe the manipulated news report and accept its standpoint, I deduce that in these countries the critical evaluation of international news on novel issues by individuals might simply 'shut down' when the news is received from the 'traditional' type of the Internet news sources (nevertheless, some difference in the perception will likely exist when it comes to specific subtypes of those news sources - TV channels, newspapers, magazines, etc.). In contrast, as far as the Dutch participants are concerned, the picture differs radically. Here, despite being regarded in general as also less trustworthy, the alternative Internet news sources are still considered as more credible when transmitting the manipulated news reports. Such a discrepancy might testify to the fact that the Dutch demonstrated the distinct judgments proceeding from two different premises: (1) stereotyping, when the generalizable assessment of the 'alternative' Internet news sources as a category was required, and (2) personal habits and experiences, when the participants imagined a concrete and 'popular' in their country alternative Internet news source that was familiar to them, from which the manipulated news report was allegedly taken. In other words, it seems to be quite a plausible reason that can be described with the phrase: "My favorite Internet news source (my Internet environment - friends, experts, etc.) cannot lie". By the same token, this approach may also hold for the Austrian and the Italian participants. However, in this case, if 'the favorite Internet news source' appears always to be regarded as truthful and credible, there are strong doubts as to the participants' abilities to critically assess particular media information as in their advancements in critical media literacy, on the whole.

The above described results make it tempting to preliminarily conclude something about the possibilities of persuading the younger Austrians and Italians, at least, through 'traditional' Internet news sources when unfamiliar or scarcely familiar international issues are concerned. Nevertheless, to all intents and purposes, it will be possible to bring the issue to a close with a further investigation using representative samples, particular types of Internet news sources (that is, concrete online media outlets, social networks, blogs and microblogs, etc.), and news messages varying in their form, content, and appeal. In so doing, future studies will likely be able to explore deeply not only this but the wider area of interest in order to get a clearer understanding as to which type of Internet news sources, to what degree, and with which means can make people informed, politically involved, and ready to take action as well as misinformed, prejudiced, and deceived.

In summary, giving weight to the destructiveness of the effects of disinformation and misinformation on public opinion, this study focused on how susceptible to those effects are young people who receive manipulated news from different types of Internet news sources. The findings raise questions not examined before about the role and the form of political competence in filtering out the manipulated media information. As it turned out, political competence, at least in this study, was unable to help in separating the husk from the grain when participants dealt with the manipulated news report on a novel issue. Such unexpected results paint, to some extent, a worrying picture: young educated, politically-interested, politically-knowledgeable, and politically-active people readily accept the manufactured reality, or pseudoreality, proposed by the news media describing a certain international 'hot-issue'. Moreover, the results of the Italian sample confirmed that not only young people act in this way. Even if we can put such effects down to the novelty of the issue and the lack of personal involvement with it, the questions remain: is there any link between critical thinking and political competence, and, if not, why do we then need political competence at all? Also, if it plays a role only on a case-by-case basis, when a politically competent individual is strongly personally involved with an issue, should we put political competence aside as an ineffective tool or a set of skills for problem-solving and decision-making and, instead, rely in all things on some guiding suggestions of the 'sages' in making our informed (or, in this case, rather quasi-informed) decisions? In this vein, future studies are expected to further investigate not only the role of individual political competence in voting, signing petitions, participating in protests as well as other kinds of political behaviors, but also how helpful it is

in a great many non-political activities, including consumptions of various types of media information, both manipulated and not, that in addition to influencing immediate evaluations and opinions also call for action, either prompt or delayed but still measurable.

APPENDIX A STUDY QUESTIONNAIRES

English

Thank you for participating in this study!

Please don't turn over until you are asked to.
Thank you!

1. To get news of any kind – politics, sport, music, society, etc. – we usually use various types of media. On the following scale from 0 to 7, where “0” means “never” and “7” means “every day”, please indicate how many days in a typical week you use the following news sources to get news:

	never							*every day*
Online sources	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Magazines	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Newspapers	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Television	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. In general, when thinking of these types of media as sources of credible news, do you regard some of them as more trustworthy than others? Please indicate your choices on the following scale from 1 to 7, where ‘1’ is ‘not at all trustworthy’ and ‘7’ is ‘very trustworthy’:

	not at all trustworthy						*very trustworthy*
Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Television	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. In general, when thinking of the Internet as a source of credible news, how would you rate the trustworthiness of <u>traditional</u> Internet news sources (that is, news websites of TV channels, newspapers, magazines, etc.) and <u>alternative</u> Internet news sources (that is, social networks, blogs)? Please indicate your opinion on the following scale, where ‘1’ is ‘ not at all trustworthy’ and ‘7’ is ‘very trustworthy’:

	not at all trustworthy			*trustworthy*			*very*
‘Traditional’ Internet news sources *(websites of TVs, newspapers, etc.)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
‘Alternative’ Internet news sources *(social networks, blogs)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

How often do the following statements apply to your own experience of getting news from various types of media?

4. I find that news media reports are fair and balanced

   always____ most of the time____ rarely____ never____

5. I believe that facts and opinions (that is, interpretations of those facts) are clearly separated in news media reports

   always____ most of the time____ rarely____ never____

6. In my opinion, the interpretations of facts in news reports are based on solid grounds and not mere assertions

   always____ most of the time____ rarely____ never____

7. I try to “read between the lines” of what I see/read in the news

   always____ most of the time____ rarely____ never____

8. Overall, I can trust news media reports

   always____ most of the time____ rarely____ never____

Thank you! Now please answer some questions on your social and political activity on the following page.

9. To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?

not at all	a little	somewhat	very much
1	2	3	4

10. On the following scale from 0 to 7, where “0”means “never” and “7” means “every day”, please mark how many days in a typical week you intentionally watch, listen to, or read political information from news media:

never *every day*

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. In a typical week, how often do you discuss political issues with other people (classmates, neighbors, friends, family, acquaintances, or strangers)?

____ never
____ once a week
____ 2-3 times a week
____ 4-5 times a week
____ 6-7 times a week
____ more than 7 times a week

12. During your political discussions with others, how often, on average, do you try to challenge the standpoints of your opponent by arguing your case?

____ never
____ rarely
____ often
____ every time I discuss politics

13. In the past 2 years, have you:

	No	Yes
· ever written a letter to a newspaper on a political issue	0	1
· joined a political organization	0	1
· already been a member of a political organization	0	1
· ever written a letter to a politician or official	0	1
· ever signed a petition on a political issue	0	1
· ever participated in a march, demonstration, or protest	0	1
· voted in the recent national elections	0	1
· attended any political meetings or rallies	0	1
· voted in the recent local elections	0	1
· ever campaigned for a candidate/political party	0	1

14. Are you going to vote:

	no	*yes*	*undecided*
- in the next national elections?	0	1	9
- in the next local elections?	0	1	9

15. Below you find an alphabetical list of eleven countries. How would you express your overall opinion of each of them on the following scale from 1 to 5, where '1' means 'very unfavorable' and '5' means 'very favorable':

	very unfavorable				very favorable
Belgium	1	2	3	4	5
Germany	1	2	3	4	5
Great Britain	1	2	3	4	5
France	1	2	3	4	5
Ireland	1	2	3	4	5
Moldova	1	2	3	4	5
Montenegro	1	2	3	4	5
Poland	1	2	3	4	5
Russia	1	2	3	4	5
United States	1	2	3	4	5
Syria	1	2	3	4	5

16. Please answer whether the following statements are true or false. Even if you are not sure, please still try to make your best guess. Only if you really cannot guess, mark the 'don't know' option:

		False	True	Don't know
1	Switzerland is a member of the EU	0	1	9
2	The European Union has 25 member states	0	1	9
3	Every country in the EU elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament	0	1	9
4	Every six months, a different Member State becomes president of the Council of the European Union	0	1	9
5	The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science is Ronald Plasterk	0	1	9
6	Dutch citizens must be at least 25 years old or older if they want to participate as candidates in elections for the House of Representatives	0	1	9
7	The Dutch House of Representatives has 225 members	0	1	9

Please now take a few moments to read the news report on the next page, and then answer the questions following the news report.

The following news report was taken from one of the most popular <u>'traditional'/'alternative'</u> Internet sources of news in your country. In order to avoid identifying the source through any of its characteristics, only the text of the news report is reprinted here in a standard computer font.

T E X T

17. Had you already heard, watched or read any information on the situation described in the news report above before reading it?

yes_____ no_____

18. In your personal opinion, is the subject of the news report important?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

19. Do you find the description of the situation in the news report easy to understand?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

20. Do you consider the news report as fact-based?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

21. Do you agree that the news report is balanced?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

22. Would you say the news report is free from allegations?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

23. Is it clear to you from the news report who is responsible for the deaths described?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

24. Please indicate on whom <u>you personally</u> place responsibility for the deaths described?

protesters_____ police_____ president_____ unclear_____

25. Overall, can the news report be trusted?

definitely yes_____ rather yes_____ rather no_____ definitely no_____

Finally, please answer some questions about yourself and your academic status:

26. What is your age? _____

27. What is your gender?

___Female ___Male

28. What is your citizenship?

_____

29. You are:

_____ 1st year student
_____ 2nd year student
_____ 3rd year student
_____ 4th year student
_____ Master's student
_____ PhD student
_____ Other (please specify)_____

30. What is your department? _____

31. What is your major/specialization? _____

Thank you very much for your participation! You've really made a great difference to this important piece of research. If you have any comments, please write them below:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Italian

Grazie per aver acconsentito a partecipare a questo studio !

Per favore, non girate la pagina finché non vi viene richiesto.

Grazie !

1. Per ogni genere di notizie – sulla politica, lo sport, la musica, la società etc.- usiamo di solito diversi tipi di fonti informative. Sulla seguente scala da 0 a 7, dove “0” significa “mai” e “7” significa “ogni giorno”, indica per favore quanti giorni alla settimana usi le seguenti fonti per ricevere notizie :

	mai							*ogni giorno*
Fonti online	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Riviste	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Quotidiani	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Televisione	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Pensando a questi tipi di media come fonti di notizie credibili, consideri alcuni di essi come più attendibili di altri ? Indica per favore le tue scelte sulla seguente scala da 1 a 7 dove ‘1’ è ‘non attendibile affatto’ e ‘7’ è ‘molto attendibile’:

	non attendibile affatto						*molto attendibile*
Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Riviste	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Quotidiani	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Televisione	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

3. Pensando a Internet come a una fonte di notizie credibili, come valuteresti l’attendibilità delle fonti <u>tradizionali</u> di notizie su Internet (cioè, siti web di telegiornali, di quotidiani, riviste etc.) e quella delle fonti <u>alternative</u> di notizie su Internet (cioè social networks, blogs etc.) ? Indica per favore la tua opinione sulla seguente scala dove ‘1’ è ‘non attendibile affatto’ e ‘7’ è ‘molto attendibile’:

	non attendibile affatto						*molto attendibile*
Fonti di notizie Internet ‘<u>tradizionali</u>’ *(websites di TV, di quotidiani, etc.)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fonti di notizie Internet ‘<u>alternative</u>’ *(social networks, blogs)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In che misura le seguenti affermazioni riflettono la tua esperienza nel ricevere notizie da vari tipi di media ?

4. Penso che le notizie nei media siano corrette ed equilibrate.

sempre____ la maggior parte delle volte____ raramente____ mai____

5. Credo che i fatti e le opinioni (cioè l'interpretazione di quei fatti) siano chiaramente separati nelle notizie riportate dai media.

sempre____ la maggior parte delle volte____ raramente____ mai____

6. Secondo me le interpretazioni dei fatti nelle notizie sono basate su solide fondamenta e non sono semplicemente asserzioni gratuite.

sempre____ la maggior parte delle volte____ raramente____ mai____

7. Quando vedo o leggo le notizie cerco di "leggere tra le righe".

sempre____ la maggior parte delle volte____ raramente____ mai____

8. Nell'insieme credo nelle notizie riportate dai media.

sempre____ la maggior parte delle volte____ raramente____ mai____

Grazie! Ti chiediamo ora di rispondere ad alcune domande sulle tue attività sociali e politiche sulla seguente pagina:

9. Quanto ti consideri interessato/a alla politica ?

per niente	poco	abbastanza	molto
1	2	3	4

10. Sulla seguente scala da 0 a 7, dove “0” significa “mai” e “7” significa “ogni giorno”, indica per favore quanti giorni, in una settimana tipo, intenzionalmente guardi, ascolti o leggi informazioni politiche dai media giornalistici:

mai							*ogni giorno*
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. In una settimana tipo, quante volte discuti di politica con altra gente (compagni di corso, vicini, amici, conoscenti o estranei) ?

____ mai
____ una volta alla settimana
____ 2-3 volte alla settimana
____ 4-5 volte alla settimana
____ 6-7 volte alla settimana
____ più di 7 volte alla settimana

12. Durante le tue discussioni politiche, quanto spesso, mediamente, cerchi di mettere in questione i punti di vista dei tuoi avversari sostenendo la tua posizione?

____ mai
____ raramente
____ spesso
____ ogni volta che discuto di politica

13. Negli ultimi 2 anni hai (mai):

	No	Sì
· scritto una lettera a un giornale su una questione politica	0	1
· fatto parte di un’organizzazione politica	0	1
· sei già stato membro di un’organizzazione politica	0	1
· scritto una lettera a un politico o a un funzionario	0	1
· firmato una petizione di argomento politico	0	1
· partecipato a una Marcia, dimostrazione o protesta	0	1
· votato nelle ultime elezioni nazionali	0	1
· partecipato ad assemblee politiche o manifestazioni	0	1
· votato nelle ultime elezioni locali	0	1
· fatto propaganda per un candidato/partito politico	0	1

14. Pensi di andare a votare :

		no	si	indeciso/a
-	nelle prossime elezioni politiche ?	0	1	9
-	nelle prossime elezioni amministrative ?	0	1	9

15. Qui di seguito troverai una lista in ordine alfabetico di 11 paesi. Come esprimeresti la tua opinione generale su ognuno di essi sulla seguente scala da 1 a 5, dove '1' significa 'sfavorevole' e '5' significa 'favorevole' :

	molto sfavorevole				*molto favorevole*
Belgio	1	2	3	4	5
Germania	1	2	3	4	5
Gran Bretagna	1	2	3	4	5
Francia	1	2	3	4	5
Irlanda	1	2	3	4	5
Moldavia	1	2	3	4	5
Montenegro	1	2	3	4	5
Polonia	1	2	3	4	5
Russia	1	2	3	4	5
Stati Uniti	1	2	3	4	5

16. Per favore indica se queste affermazioni sono vere o false. Anche se non sei sicuro, prova ugualmente a fare la tua migliore ipotesi. Segna la risposta "non so" solo se non sai veramente che cosa rispondere:

		Falso	Vero	Non so
1	La Svizzera è uno Stato Membro dell'Unione Europea.	0	1	9
2	L'Unione Europea è composta da 25 Stati Membri	0	1	9
3	Ogni Stato Membro dell'UE elegge lo stesso numero di Europarlamentari.	0	1	9
4	Ogni sei mesi, un diverso Stato Membro diventa presidente del Consiglio dell'Unione Europea.	0	1	9
5	Il Ministro della Pubblica Istruzione in Italia è Francesco Profumo	0	1	9
6	E' necessario avere almeno 25 anni per candidarsi alle elezioni nazionali in Italia.	0	1	9
7	La Camera dei Deputati ha 945 membri	0	1	9

Ti chiediamo ora di dedicare qualche minuto alla lettura delle notizie riportate nella prossima pagina, e rispondi poi alle domande che seguono.

La seguente notizia è stata ripresa da una delle più note fonti '<u>tradizionali/alternative</u>' di notizie su Internet nel tuo paese.

Per evitare l'identificazione della fonte attraverso una qualsiasi delle sue caratteristiche, è riportato qui solo il testo della notizia stampato in un carattere tipografico standard.

17. Avevi già sentito, visto o letto qualcosa sulla situazione descritta nella notizia riportata sopra prima di leggerla ?

sì _____ no_____

18. Secondo te, l'argomento della notizia è importante ?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

19. Trovi che la descrizione della situazione riportata nella notizia sia facile da capire ?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

20. Pensi che la notizia sia basata su fatti ?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

21. Concordi che la notizia sia equilibrata ?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

22. Diresti che nel resoconto della notizia non ci sono asserzioni infondate?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

23. Secondo te risulta chiaramente dalla notizia chi è responsabile della morte descritta ?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

24. Potresti indicare chi secondo te è responsabile della morte descritta ?

i dimostranti_____ la polizia_____ il presidente_____ non è chiaro_____

25. Nell'insieme, diresti che la notizia è attendibile ?

assolutamente sì_____ più sì che no_____ più no che sì_____ assolutamente no_____

Infine, puoi rispondere per favore ad alcune domande su di te e il tuo status accademico:

26. Quanti anni hai? _____

27. Di che sesso sei ?

____Femminile ____Maschile

28. Qual è la tua cittadinanza ? _____

29. Sei:
    - ____ studente di 1° anno
    - ____ studente di 2° anno
    - ____ studente di 3° anno
    - ____ studente di 4° anno
    - ____ Laureato (Master)
    - ____ Dottorando
    - ____ Altro (specificare) _____

30. Qual è il tuo dipartimento?

    _____

31. Qual è il tuo indirizzo di laurea/la tua specializzazione ?

    _____

Grazie veramente di aver partecipato ! Hai dato un contributo assolutamente essenziale a questa importante parte della ricerca. Se hai dei commenti, per favore scrivili qui di seguito :

_____
_____
_____
_____

German

Danke für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung!

Bitte, beginnen Sie nicht, bevor Sie nicht dazu aufgefordert werden!

Danke!

1. Um Nachrichten jeglicher Art zu erfahren – Politik, Sport, Musik, Gesellschaft – greifen wir gewöhnlich auf verschiedene Medien zurück. Auf der folgenden Skala von 0 bis 7, wobei “0” - “nie ” und “7” - “jeden Tag ” bedeutet, markieren Sie bitte, wie viele Tage in einer typischen Woche Sie auf folgende Medien zurückgreifen, um Nachrichten zu erhalten:

	nie							*jeden Tag*
Internet	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeitschriften	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeitungen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Radio	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fernsehen	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. Wenn Sie darüber nachdenken, wie/ob diese Medien im Allgemeinen Nachrichten glaubwürdig darstellen, finden Sie einige von diesen glaubwürdiger als andere? Markieren Sie bitte Ihre Wahl auf der folgenden Skala von 1 bis 7, wobei “1” - “überhaupt nicht glaubwürdig ” und “7” - “sehr glaubwürdig” bedeutet:

	überhaupt nicht glaubwürdig						*sehr*	*glaubwürdig*
Internet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zeitschriften	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Zeitungen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Radio	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Fernsehen	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. Wenn Sie generell über das Internet als Quelle glaubwürdiger Nachrichten nachdenken, wie würden Sie die Glaubwürdigkeit der “<u>TRADITIONELLEN</u>” Internet-Nachrichtenquellen (d.h. die verschiedenen Websites der Fernsehkanäle, Zeitungen, Zeitschriften, Nachrichtenagenturen, etc.) und „<u>ALTERNATIVEN</u>“ Internet-Nachrichtenquellen (d.h. soziale Netzwerke, Blogs) bewerten? Markieren Sie bitte ihre Meinung auf der folgenden Skala, wobei “1” - “überhaupt nicht glaubwürdig ” und “7” - “sehr glaubwürdig” bedeutet:

	überhaupt nicht glaubwürdig						*sehr glaubwürdig*
“Traditionelle” Internetquellen (d.h. Sites der TV-Kanäle, Zeitungen, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
‘Alternative’ Internetquellen (d.h.soziale Netzwerke, Blogs)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Wie oft treffen die folgenden Aussagen Ihrer eigenen Erfahrung nach auf die verschiedenen Medien zu?

4. Ich finde, dass die Medienberichte fair und ausgewogen sind.

immer ____ meistens____ selten____ nie____

5. Ich glaube, dass Fakten und Meinungen (d.h. Interpretationen dieser Fakten) in den Nachrichtenberichten klar getrennt werden.

immer ____ meistens____ selten____ nie____

6. Meiner Meinung nach basieren die Interpretationen der Fakten in Nachrichtenberichten auf gründlicher Recherche und sind nicht bloße Behauptungen.

immer ____ meistens____ selten____ nie____

7. Ich versuche, in dem was ich sehe/höre, “zwischen den Zeilen” zu lesen.

immer ____ meistens____ selten____ nie____

8. Alles in Allem kann ich Nachrichtenberichten Glauben schenken.

immer ____ meistens____ selten____ nie____

Vielen Dank! Jetzt beantworten Sie bitte einige Fragen zu Ihrem sozialen und politischen Engagement auf der folgenden Seite

9. Wie sehr interessieren Sie sich für Politik?

gar nicht	wenig	ziemlich	sehr
1	2	3	4

10. Auf der folgenden Skala von 0 bis 7, wobei „0" - "nie" und „7“ - "jeden Tag" bedeutet, markieren Sie bitte, wie viele Tage einer typischen Woche Sie bewusst über die Medien politische Informationen ansehen, hören, oder lesen:

nie						jeden Tag
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

11. Wie oft diskutieren Sie in einer typischen Woche mit anderen (Kommilitonen, Nachbarn, Freunden, Familie, Bekanntschaften oder Fremden) über politische Themen?

_____ nie
_____ einmal pro Woche
_____ zwei- bis dreimal pro Woche
_____ 4-5 mal pro Woche
_____ 6-7mal pro Woche
_____ mehr als 7 mal pro Woche

12. Wie oft versuchen Sie im Durchschnitt während Ihrer politischen Diskussionen die Meinungen Ihres Gegenübers durch Ihre Argumentation zu ändern?

____ nie
____ selten
____ oft
____ jeden Mal, wenn ich über Politik diskutiere

13. Haben Sie in den letzten zwei Jahren:

	Nein	Ja
- einen Brief mit politischem Inhalt an eine Zeitung geschrieben	0	1
- (Sind Sie) einer politischen Organisation beigetreten	0	1
- (Sind sie) bereits Mitglied einer politischen Organisation	0	1
- einen Brief an eine(n) Politiker/in oder Amtsträger/in geschrieben	0	1
- eine Petition zu einem politischen Thema unterschrieben	0	1
- an einer Demonstration, Protestmarsch teilgenommen	0	1
- bei den letzten nationalen Wahlen gewählt	0	1
- an politischen Treffen teilgenommen	0	1
- bei den letzten regionalen Wahlen gewählt	0	1
- sich für eine(n) Kandidaten/in oder eine politische Partei im Wahlkampf engagiert	0	1

14. Werden Sie zur Wahl gehen:

	nein	ja	weiß nicht
- bei den nächsten nationalen Wahlen?	0	1	9
- bei den nächsten regionalen Wahlen?	0	1	9

15. Im Folgenden finden Sie eine alphabetische Liste mit elf Ländern. Wie würden Sie auf einer Skala von 1 bis 5, wo „1“ - „sehr negativ“ und „5“ - „sehr positiv“ bedeutet, Ihre allgemeine Einstellung zu diesen Ländern ausdrücken?

	sehr negativ				*sehr positiv*
Belgien	1	2	3	4	5
Deutschland	1	2	3	4	5
Großbritannien	1	2	3	4	5
Frankreich	1	2	3	4	5
Irland	1	2	3	4	5
Moldawien	1	2	3	4	5
Montenegro	1	2	3	4	5
Polen	1	2	3	4	5
Russland	1	2	3	4	5
USA	1	2	3	4	5
Syrien	1	2	3	4	5

16. Beantworten Sie bitte, ob die folgenden Aussagen richtig oder falsch sind. Selbst wenn Sie nicht sicher sein sollten, versuchen Sie bitte trotzdem eine Einschätzung zu geben. Nur, wenn Sie überhaupt keine Vorstellung haben, markieren Sie die „weiß nicht“-Option:

		Falsch	Richtig	Weiß nicht
1	Die Schweiz ist Mitglied der Europäischen Union	0	1	9
2	Die EU besteht derzeit aus 25 Mitgliedsländern	0	1	9
3	Jedes Mitgliedsland der Europäischen Union wählt dieselbe Anzahl von Abgeordneten des Europäischen Parlaments	0	1	9
4	Alle sechs Monate übernimmt ein anderes Mitgliedsland die Präsidentschaft des Rates der Europäischen Union	0	1	9
5*	Die österreichische Bundesministerin für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur heißt Dr. Claudia Schmied	0	1	9
6*	Um bei Nationalratswahlen zu kandidieren, muss man mindestens 25 Jahre alt sein	0	1	9
7*	Der Nationalrat hat 275 Mitglieder	0	1	9

Nehmen Sie sich jetzt bitte etwas Zeit, um den Bericht auf der nächsten Seite zu lesen, und dann beantworten Sie bitte danach folgende Fragen.

Der folgende Bericht wurde von einer der bekanntesten "ALTERNATIVEN" Internet-Nachrichtenquellen Ihres Landes übernommen.

Um zu verhindern, dass Sie die Quelle bestimmter ihrer Eigenschaften identifizieren, ist der Text des Berichts in Standardcomputerschrift wiedergegeben.

17. Hatten Sie bereits etwas über die hier beschriebene Situation gehört, gesehen oder gelesen, ehe Sie diesen Bericht gelesen haben?

ja_____ nein_____

18. Ist Ihrer Meinung nach das Thema des Berichts wichtig?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

19. Finden Sie die Beschreibung der Situation in dem Bericht leicht zu verstehen?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

20. Basiert der Bericht Ihrer Meinung nach auf Fakten?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

21. Stimmen Sie zu, dass der Bericht ausgewogen ist?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

22. Würden Sie sagen, dass der Bericht frei von Behauptungen ist?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

23. Geht für Sie aus dem Bericht klar hervor, wer für den beschriebenen Tod verantwortlich ist?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

24. Markieren Sie bitte, wem Sie persönlich die Verantwortung für den beschriebenen Tod geben:

den Protestierenden _____ der Polizei _____ dem Präsidenten _____ unklar _____

25. Können Sie dem Bericht insgesamt vertrauen?

eindeutig ja _____ eher ja_____ eher nein _____ eindeutig nein_____

Könnten sie zum Abschluss bitte einige Fragen zu Ihrer Person und zu Ihrer wissenschaftlichen Ausbildung beantworten:

26. Wie alt sind Sie? _____

27. Welches Geschlecht haben Sie?

____ weiblich ____ männlich

28. Welche Staatsangehörigkeit haben Sie?

_____

29. Sie sind: :

____ Studierende(r) im 1. Jahr
____ Studierende(r) im 2. Jahr
____ Studierende(r) im 3. Jahr
____ Studierende(r) im 4. Jahr
____ Studierende(r) im Masterprogramm
____ Doktorand
____ Sonstiges

30. In welchem Fachbereich studieren Sie? keine Anwendung_____

_____

31. Was ist Ihr Fachgebiet/Ihre Spezialisierung? (noch) keine_____

_____

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme! Sie haben zu dieser wichtigen Forschungsarbeit wesentlich beigetragen. Wenn Sie irgendwelche Kommentare zu dieser Studie machen möchten, schreiben Sie sie bitter hier auf:

_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX B NEWS REPORTS

German/Non-manipulated

Lokale Protestaktion in der Republik Moldau gegen die Gräueltaten des syrischen Regimes führen zu Tod eines Demonstranten.

Notärzte gehen von Herzinfarkt als Todesursache aus; trotzdem wird eine genauere Untersuchung des Falles durchgeführt werden.

Heute wurde Chisinau, die Hauptstadt Moldawiens, ein europäisches Nachbarland im Osten der EU, Schauplatz einer lokalen Protestaktion zur Unterstützung des syrischen Volkes gegen die Gräueltaten des syrischen Präsidenten Bashar al-Assad. Die Demonstranten forderten den Rücktritt von al-Assad und die Durchführung vorgezogener freien Wahlen in Syrien. Augenzeugen berichten von Spruchbändern mit der Aufschrift „Schluss mit den Gräueltaten", „Nieder mit dem Diktator" und „Freie Wahlen sofort".

Die Protestierenden marschierten zur syrischen Botschaft und versuchten diese mit faulen Eiern und Tomaten zu bewerfen. Die Polizei von Moldawien verhinderte dies jedoch und drängte die Massen auf sichere Distanz zum Botschaftsgebäude zurück. Kurz nachdem die Demonstranten ihre Anti-Assad- Kundgebung gegenüber dem Botschaftsgebäude wieder aufnahmen, fiel einer von ihnen plötzlich zu Boden und verstarb kurz darauf. Notärzte erreichten den Schauplatz nur wenige Minuten später und stellten den Tod des Mannes durch einen Herzinfarkt fest.

Die moldauische politische Opposition beschuldigte mit ihrer Nachrichtenagentur "Salut" jedoch sofort den moldauischen Präsidenten, am Tod des Demonstranten schuld zu sein, indem er der Polizei persönlich eine *carte blanche* ausgestellt habe, strenge Maßnahmen gegen die Protestierenden einzusetzen. Der Chef der Polizei hat jegliche direkte oder indirekte Beteiligung der Polizisten am Tod des Demonstranten ausgeschlossen. Der Präsident seinerseits bezeichnete die Anschuldigungen als „unfundiert und lächerlich", hat allerdings angeordnet, eine genaue Untersuchung der Todesursache des Demonstranten durchzuführen und das Ergebnis der Untersuchung öffentlich zu machen.

German/Manipulated

Friedliche Demonstranten sterben jetzt in Europa: Sie fordern freie Wahlen und demokratische Regeln

Wenigstens ein Demonstrant wurde gestern während eines Massenprotests in der moldauischen Hauptstadt von der Polizei getötet.

Heute wurde Chisinau, die Hauptstadt Moldawiens, ein europäisches Nachbarland im Osten der EU, Schauplatz massiver Straßenproteste. Die Demonstranten forderten den Rücktritt des Präsidenten und seiner Regierung, sowie vorgezogene Wahlen. Augenzeugen berichten von Spruchbändern mit der Aufschrift „Schluss mit den Gräueltaten", „Nieder mit dem Diktator" und „Freie Wahlen sofort". Es wurde von Zusammenstößen mit der Polizei berichtet, die wenigstens einen Toten unter den Protestierenden zur Folge hatten.

Die moldauische politische Opposition beschuldigte mit ihrer Nachrichtenagentur "Salut" sofort den Präsidenten, für den Tod von unschuldigen Demonstranten die Verantwortung zu tragen. Mitglieder der Opposition behaupten, dass der Präsident der Polizei direkte Order erteilte, Gewalt anzuwenden und äußerst strenge Maßnahmen gegen die Protestierenden einzusetzen. Es ist nicht das erste Mal, dass Moldawien Zeiten politischer Instabilität erlebt, aber niemals zuvor haben politische Unruhen zu Toten geführt. Laut „Salut" ist zu erwarten, dass die Todesrate noch dramatisch ansteigen wird.

Da die Republik Moldau ein EU-Nachbar ist, beabsichtigt die moldauische Opposition, die Institutionen der Europäischen Union anzurufen um die Situation im Lande zu retten. Die Opposition betont insbesondere, dass es von großer Wichtigkeit sei, ein Blutbad zu verhindern, die Menschenrechte des moldauischen Volkes zu schützen und zu verhindern, dass die demokratischen Errungenschaften wieder abgeschafft werden. Sonst könnte die immer noch friedliche Europäische Union mit neuen und starken Kopfschmerzen in Form eines weiteren politisch und wirtschaftlich instabilen Gebiets an ihren Grenzen aufwachen, die sich mit der Zeit in einen Alptraum verwandeln könnten.

Italian/Non-manipulated

Nella Repubblica di Moldavia una dimostrazione popolare di sostegno contro le atrocità del regime siriano si conclude con la morte di un dimostrante

Medici del Pronto soccorso ritengono la morte causata da infarto; ciononostante un'inchiesta approfondita verrà svolta sul caso.

Oggi Chisinau, la capitale della Moldavia, un paese europeo confinante a Est con l'UE, è stata teatro di una dimostrazione popolare di sostegno del popolo siriano contro le atrocità del presidente siriano Bashar al-Assad. I dimostranti hanno chiesto le dimissioni di al-Assad ed elezioni anticipate indipendenti in Siria. Testimoni riferiscono di striscioni con scritto "Basta con le atrocità", "Via il dittatore", e "Libere elezioni subito".

I dimostranti hanno marciato verso l'Ambasciata siriana e cercato di colpirla con uova marce e pomodori, ma la polizia moldava li ha fermati e respinto la folla a una distanza di sicurezza dall'edificio dell'Ambasciata. Subito dopo che i dimostranti hanno iniziato la loro marcia anti-Assad di fronte all'Ambasciata siriana, uno di loro è improvvisamente caduto a terra e morto poco dopo. I medici del Pronto soccorso arrivati sulla scena qualche minuto dopo hanno constatato la morte dell'uomo per infarto.

L'opposizione politica moldava ha comunque immediatamente accusato il Presidente moldavo della morte del dimostrante attraverso l'agenzia di stampa 'Salut', affermando che l'uomo era stato ucciso dalla polizia a cui il Presidente aveva dato personalmente *carta bianca* sull'uso di misure severe contro i dimostranti. Il capo della polizia ha negato ogni diretto o indiretto coinvolgimento dei poliziotti con la morte del dimostrante. A sua volta, il Presidente ha definito le accuse "infondate e ridicole", ma ha dato ordine di svolgere un'approfondita inchiesta sulla morte del dimostrante e di rendere pubblici i risultati dell'indagine

Italian/Manipulated

Anche pacifici dimostranti muoiono in Europa: volevano libere elezioni e un governo democratico

Almeno un dimostrante ucciso dalla polizia durante dimostrazioni di protesta popolare nella capitale moldava.

Oggi Chisinau, capitale della Repubblica Moldova, un paese europeo confinante a Est con l'UE, è stata teatro di massicce dimostrazioni di piazza. I dimostranti chiedevano le dimissioni del Presidente e del Governo ed elezioni anticipate. Testimoni riferiscono di striscioni con scritto "Basta con le atrocità", "Via il dittatore", e "Libere elezioni subito". Sono stati segnalati anche scontri con la polizia, in seguito ai quali si è contato almeno un morto tra i dimostranti.

L'opposizione politica moldava, attraverso la sua agenzia di stampa 'Salut', ha immediatamente accusato il Presidente della morte di dimostranti innocenti. I membri dell'opposizione sostengono che il Presidente abbia dato ordine alla polizia di usare violenza e adottare misure severe contro i dimostranti. Questa non è la prima volta che la Moldavia vive periodi di instabilità politica, ma mai prima d'ora agitazioni politiche avevano condotto alla morte dei partecipanti. Ci si aspetta che il numero dei morti possa aumentare anche più drammaticamente, avverte 'Salut'.

Dal momento che la Repubblica moldava è una vicina dell'UE, l'opposizione moldava intende fare appello affinché le istituzioni europee intervengano per salvare la situazione del paese. In particolare, l'opposizione sostiene che sia di fondamentale importanza prevenire spargimenti di sangue per proteggere i diritti umani della popolazione moldava e far sì che le conquiste democratiche non vadano perdute. Altrimenti l'ancora pacifica Unione europea potrebbe ritrovarsi con un nuovo e serio problema nella forma di un'altra zona politicamente ed economicamente instabile ai suoi confini, che, con il tempo, potrebbe trasformarsi in un incubo.

English/Non-manipulated

Grassroots show of support in Moldova Republic against atrocities of Syrian regime results in death of protester

Emergency doctors claim death caused by heart attack; in-depth inquiry to be carried out into the case nevertheless.

Today Chisinau, the capital of Moldova, a European country neighboring the EU to the east, has been the scene of a grassroots show of support of the Syrian people, against the atrocities of the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. The marchers called for al-Assad's resignation and the holding of independent pre-term elections in Syria. Eyewitnesses report about banners reading "Stop atrocities", "Down with the dictator", and "Free elections now".

The protesters marched to the Syrian embassy and tried to bombard it with rotten eggs and tomatoes, but the Moldavian police stopped this and pushed the crowd back to a safe distance from the embassy building. Soon after the marchers began their anti-Assad rally opposite the Syrian embassy, one of them fell suddenly to the ground and died shortly afterwards. The emergency doctors arrived on the scene minutes later and pronounced the man as dead, the result of a heart attack.

The Moldavian political opposition, however, promptly blamed the Moldavian president for the death of the demonstrator through its news agency 'Salut', stating that he was killed by the police, which was given the president's personal *carte blanche* to use severe measures against the protestors. The chief of the police has denied any direct or circumstantial involvement of policemen with the protester's death. In turn, the president has called the accusations "unfounded and ridiculous", but has given the order to carry out an in-depth inquiry into the demonstrator's death and to make the results of the investigation public.

English/Manipulated

Peaceful protesters now die in Europe: They want free elections and democratic rule
At least one demonstrator killed by police during mass protest demonstration in Moldovian capital.

Today Chisineu, the capital of the Republic of Moldova, a European country neighboring the EU to the east, has been the scene of massive street demonstrations. The marchers called for the President's and Cabinet's resignations, and pre-term elections. Eyewitnesses report about banners reading "Stop atrocities", "Down with the dictator", and "Free elections now". Clashes with the police were also reported, resulting in at least one death among the protesters.

The Moldavian political opposition promptly blamed the president for the deaths of the innocent demonstrators through its news agency 'Salut'. The opposition members claim that the President gave direct orders to the police to use violence and to adopt very severe measures against the protesters. This is not the first time that Moldova has experienced periods of political instability, but never before has political turmoil led to any loss of life. It is expected that the death toll will rise even more dramatically, 'Salut' cautions.

Given that the Moldova Republic is a neighbor of the EU, the Moldavian opposition intends to call on the European Union's institutions to step in to save the situation in the country. Specifically, the opposition claims that it is of critical importance to prevent bloodshed, to protect the human rights of the Moldavian people and to prevent their democratic achievements from being abolished. Otherwise, the still peaceful European Union might find itself with a new and severe headache in the form of another politically and economically instable zone on its borders which, with time, may turn into a nightmare.

APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL STATISTICS ON AGE CATEGORY OF 18-26 YEAR OLDS (DUTCH, AUSTRIAN AND ITALIAN SAMPLES)

1. Descriptive statistics for the study questions

1.1. Pre-stimuli questions

1.1.1. Use and trustworthiness of news media

Participants preferences for particular news media sources to get news from in a typical week are shown in Figure 26 and Table 86.

Figure 26. Using news media in a typical week (by country), mean values

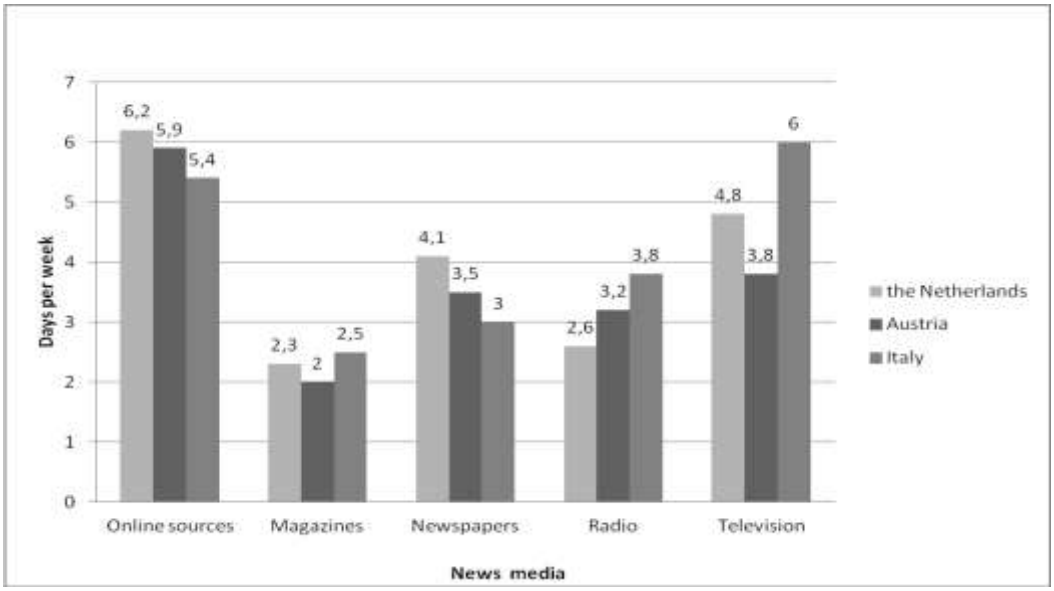


Table 86. Days in a typical week participants use the following news media sources to get news (by country)

News media sources	Austria	The Netherlands	Italy
Online sources	*N = 225* *X* = 5,9 Md = 7 SD = 1,8	*N = 273* *X* = 6,2 Md = 7 SD = 1,5	*N = 236* *X* = 5,4 Md = 6 SD = 1,8
Magazines	*N = 223* *X* = 2 Md = 2 SD = 1,8	*N = 270* *X* = 2,3 Md = 2 SD = 1,6	*N = 233* *X* = 2,5 Md = 2 SD = 1,7
Newspapers	*N = 225* *X* = 3,5 Md = 3 SD = 2	*N = 274* *X* = 4,1 Md = 4 SD = 2,1	*N = 234* *X* = 3 Md = 3 SD = 1,9
Radio	*N = 224* *X* = 3,2 Md = 3 SD = 2,6	*N = 273* *X* = 2,6 Md = 2 SD = 2,2	*N = 235* *X* = 3,8 Md = 4 SD = 2,2
Television	*N = 225* *X* = 3,8 Md = 4 SD = 2,5	*N = 274* *X* = 4,8 Md = 5 SD = 1,8	*N = 235* *X* = 6 Md = 7 SD = 1,5
TOTAL, *N*	**225**	**274**	**237**

As is seen from Table 86 and Figure 26, participants from the Netherlands and Austria prefer online news sources for getting news of any kind in a typical week followed by television, while Italian participants prefer television as a source of news which is followed by

online news sources. The third utilized news source for Dutch and Austrian participants is newspapers, while for Italians this is radio. Although, radio is nearly as useful as newspapers for Austrians, too.

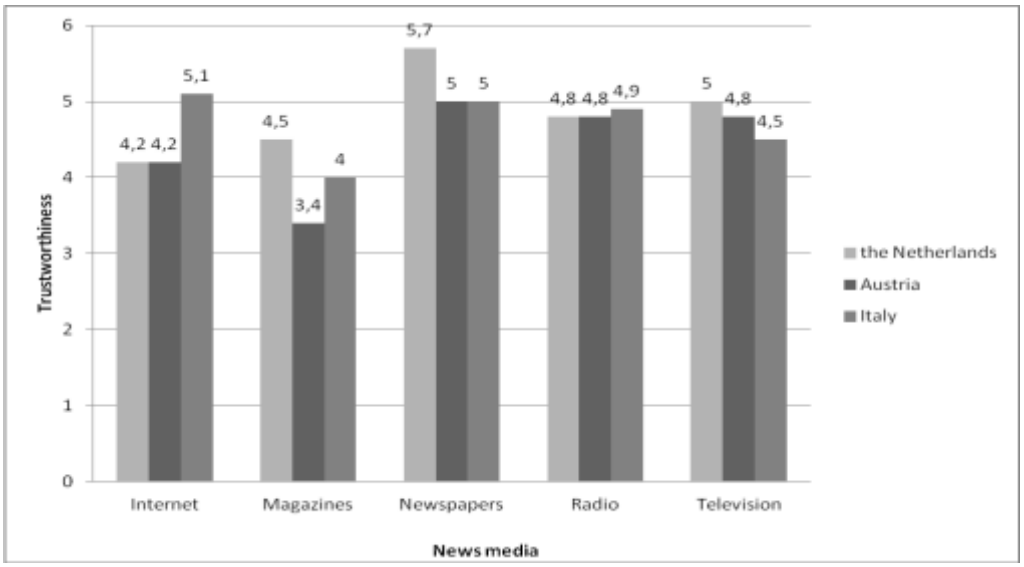
In regard to trustworthiness of particular news media as sources of credible news in general, participants from all the three countries gave high estimates to newspapers. In addition, the Dutch participants ranked trustworthiness of newspapers the highest, while the Italian participants reckoned that both newspapers and the Internet were equally sources of credible news. Interestingly, the Austrian participants ranked Internet news sources the last but one out of five as to trustworthiness and the Dutch participants regarded those as the least trustworthy altogether. The results are shown in Figure 27 and Table 87.

Table 87. Trustworthiness of news media as sources of credible news (by country)*

News media sources	Austria	the Netherlands	Italy
Internet	*N = 224* *X* = 4,2 Md = 4 SD = 1,2	*N = 274* *X* = 4,2 Md = 4 SD = 1,2	*N = 236* *X* = 5,1 Md = 5 SD = 1,3
Magazines	*N = 224* *X* = 3,4 Md = 3 SD = 1,5	*N = 273* *X* = 4,5 Md = 5 SD = 1,5	*N = 233* *X* = 4 Md = 4 SD = 1,6
Newspapers	*N = 224* *X* = 5 Md = 5 SD = 1,4	*N = 274* *X* = 5,7 Md = 6 SD = 1,1	*N = 236* *X* = 5 Md = 5 SD = 1,5
Radio	*N = 222* *X* = 4,8 Md = 5 SD = 1,3	*N = 270* *X* = 4,8 Md = 5 SD = 1,2	*N = 236* *X* = 4,9 Md = 5 SD = 1,4
Television	*N = 224* *X* = 4,8 Md = 5 SD = 1,4	*N = 274* *X* = 5 Md = 5 SD = 1,2	*N = 237* *X* = 4,5 Md = 5 SD = 1,7
TOTAL, *N*	**225**	**274**	**237**

* Measured on 7-point scale, with '1' as 'not at all trustworthy' and '7' as 'very trustworthy'.

Figure 27. Trustworthiness of news media as sources of credible news (by country), mean values



1.1.1.1. Trustworthiness of Internet news sources

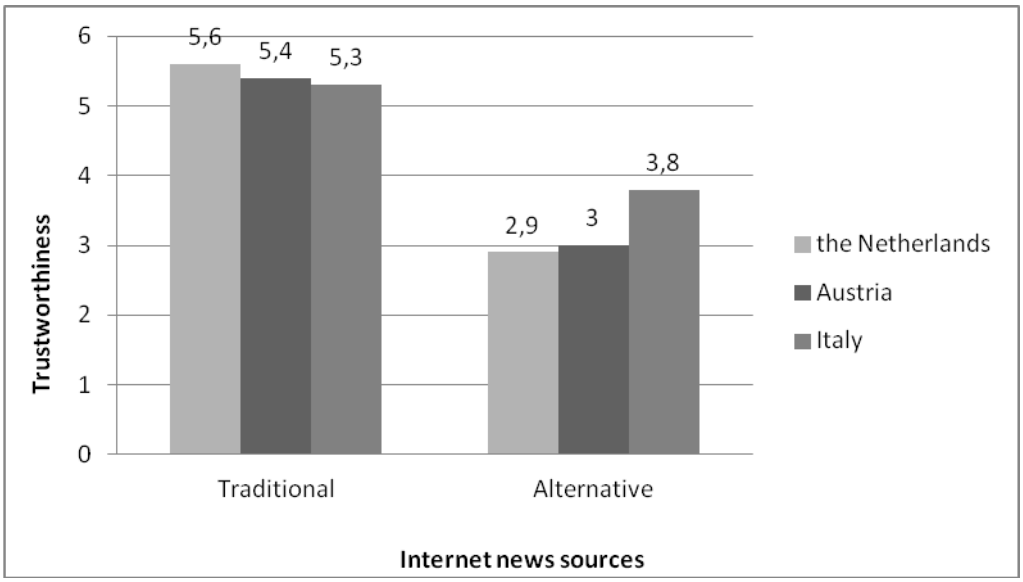
When answering the question about the trustworthiness in general of 'traditional' Internet news sources -- in comparison to their 'alternative' counterparts -- as sources of credible news, participants of all the three countries ranked the former as far more trustworthy than the latter. However, what is interesting is the fact that the general estimate given by the Italian participants to 'alternative' Internet news sources was higher compared to participants from Austria and the Netherlands. The results are shown in Table 88 and Figure 28.

Table 88. Trustworthiness of 'traditional' and 'alternative' Internet news media as sources of credible news (by country)*

Internet news sources	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
'Traditional'	*N = 274* *X* = 5,6 Md = 6 SD = 0,9	*N = 225* *X* = 5,4 Md = 6 SD = 1,2	*N = 236* *X* = 5,3 Md = 6 SD = 1,2
'Alternative'	*N = 274* *X* = 2,9 Md = 3 SD = 1,1	*N = 225* *X* = 3 Md = 3 SD = 1,3	*N = 236* *X* = 3,8 Md = 4 SD = 1,5
TOTAL, *N*	**274**	**225**	**237**

* Measured on 7-point scale, with '1' as 'not at all trustworthy' and '7' as 'very trustworthy'.

Figure 28. Trustworthiness of 'traditional' and 'alternative' Internet news media as sources of credible news (by country), mean values



1.1.2. Informed media mistrust scale by questions

Analysis of each of the four components of the scale brought the following results displayed in Tables 89 - 92 and Figures 29 - 32. In particular, participants were asked to apply the mentioned four statements to their own experience of getting news from various types of news media. Eighty percent of the Dutch participants and more than 50 percent of the Austrian and Italian participants found that news media reports are fair and balanced. More than 50 percent of participants from all the three countries did not believe that facts and opinions are usually clearly separated in news media reports. However, 72 percent of the Austrian participants and 66 percent of the Dutch participants stated that interpretations of facts in news reports are based on solid grounds and are not mere assertions, while opinions of the Italian participants were split in half on that matter. Finally, 18 percent of the Austrian participants and 12 percent of the Dutch participants said that they can trust news media reports only rarely, whereas of the Italian participants 31 percent expressed the same opinion.

Table 89. Distribution of answers to the question *"I find that news media reports are fair and balanced"*, % & *N* (by country)

Answer options	Austria		the Netherlands		Italy	
	%	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
Always	**-**	-	***1,1***	*3*	***0,4***	*1*
Most of the time	***54,2***	*122*	***79,2***	*217*	***55,5***	*131*
Rarely	***43,1***	*97*	***19,3***	*53*	***42,8***	*101*
Never	***2,7***	*6*	***0,4***	*1*	***1,3***	*3*
TOTAL	***100%***	**225**	***100%***	**274**	***100%***	**236**

Figure 29. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"I find that news media reports are fair and balanced"* (by country)

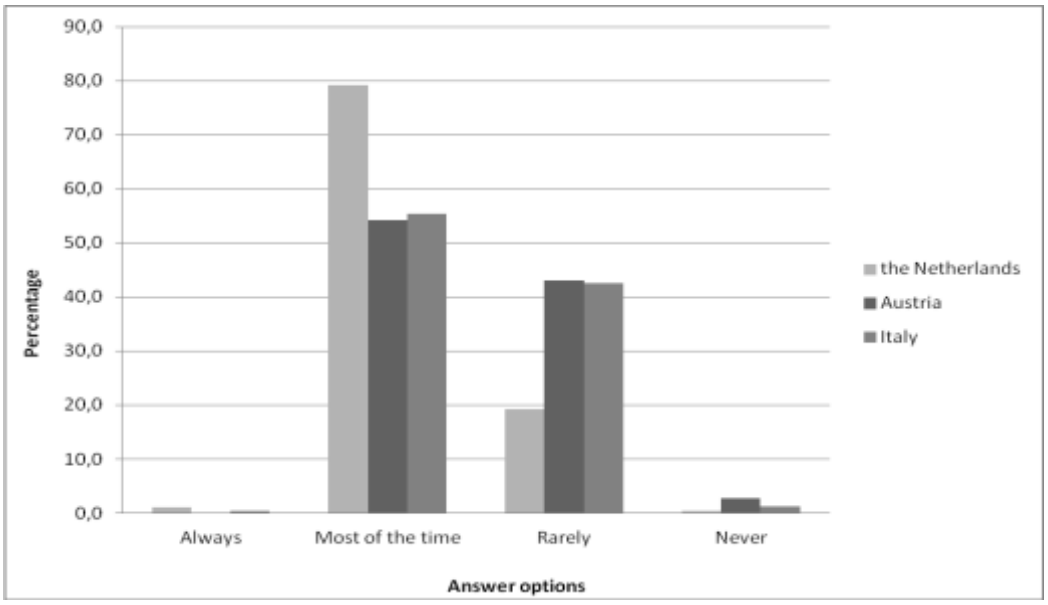


Table 90. Distribution of answers to the question *"I believe that facts and opinions (that is, interpretations of those facts) are clearly separated in news media reports"*, % & *N* (by country)

Answer options	Austria		the Netherlands		Italy	
	%	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
Always	***0,4***	1	***0,4***	*1*	***1,7***	*4*
Most of the time	***47,1***	*106*	***47,8***	*131*	***41,9***	*99*
Rarely	***49,3***	*111*	***51,5***	*141*	***50,0***	*118*
Never	***3,1***	*7*	***0,4***	*1*	***6,4***	*15*
TOTAL	***100%***	**225**	***100%***	**274**	***100%***	**236**

Figure 30. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"I believe that facts and opinions (that is, interpretations of those facts) are clearly separated in news media reports"* (by country)

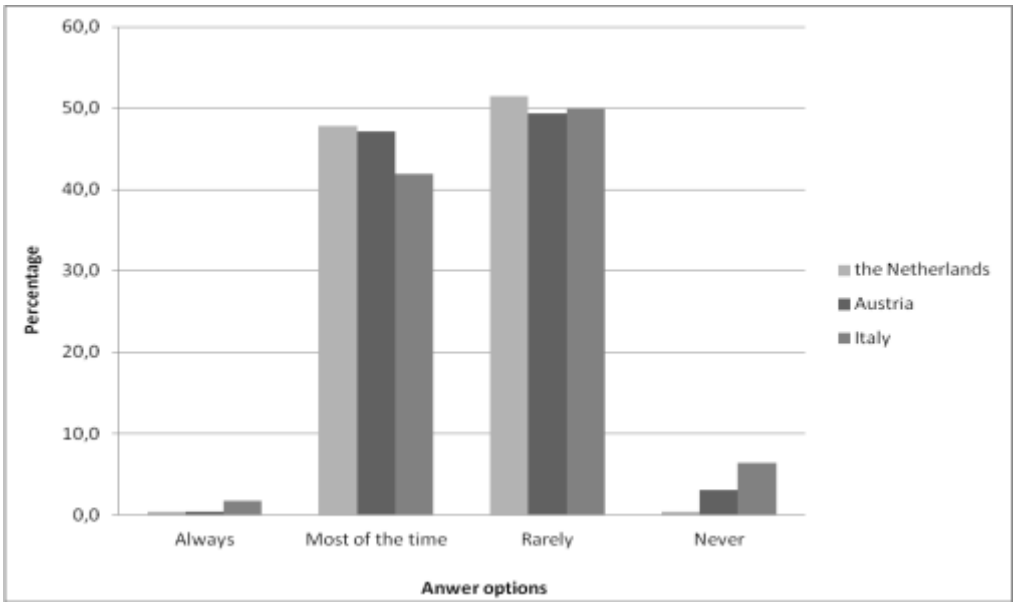


Table 91. Distribution of answers to the question *"In my opinion, the interpretations of facts in news reports are based on solid grounds and not mere assertions"*, % & *N* (by country)

Answer options	Austria		the Netherlands		Italy	
	%	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
Always	***4,0***	9	***0,7***	*2*	***1,3***	*3*
Most of the time	***68,4***	*154*	***65,7***	*180*	***46,2***	*108*
Rarely	***26,7***	*60*	***33,6***	*92*	***48,7***	*114*
Never	***0,9***	*2*	**-**	-	***3,8***	*9*
TOTAL	***100%***	**225**	***100%***	**274**	***100%***	**234**

Figure 31. Percentage of distribution of answers to the question *"In my opinion, the interpretations of facts in news reports are based on solid grounds and not mere assertions"* (by country)

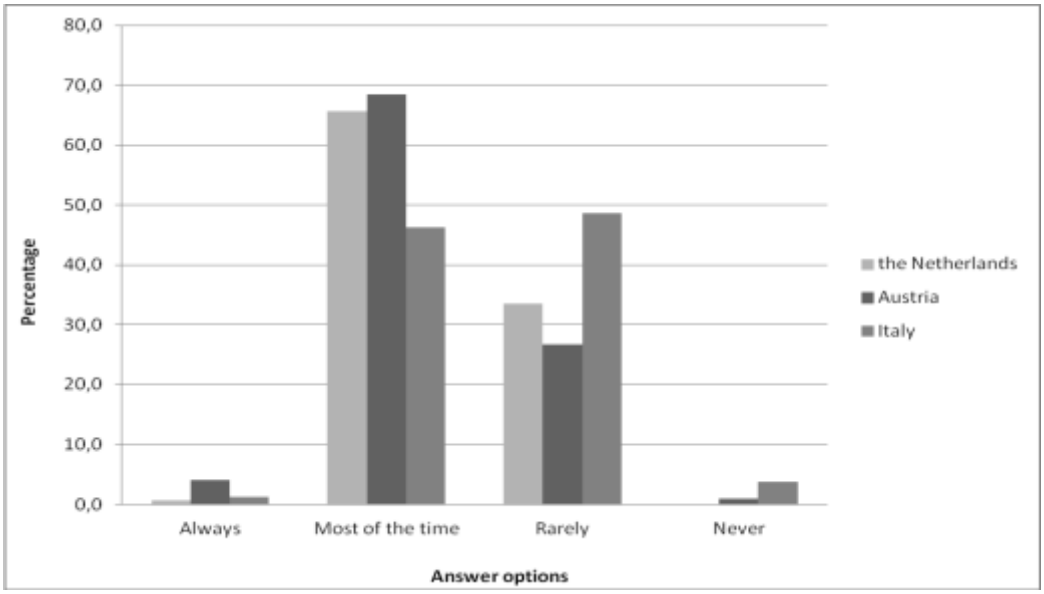
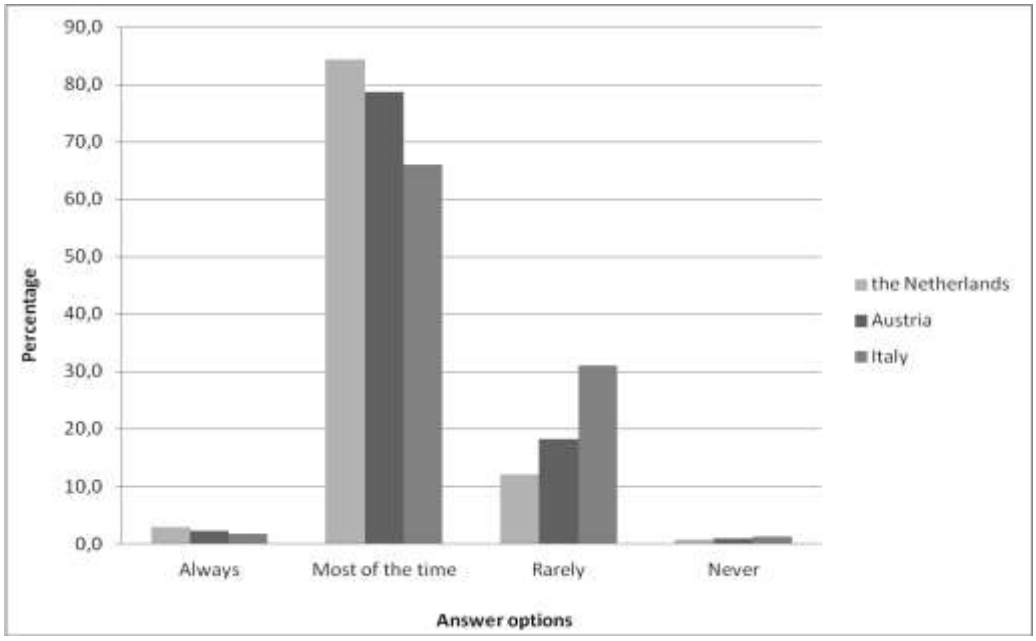


Table 92. Distribution of answers to the question *"Overall, I can trust news media reports", % & N* (by country)

Answer options	Austria		the Netherlands		Italy	
	%	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
Always	***2,2***	5	***2,9***	*8*	***1,7***	*4*
Most of the time	***78,7***	*177*	***84,3***	*231*	***66,0***	*155*
Rarely	***18,2***	*41*	***12,0***	*33*	***31,1***	*73*
Never	***0,9***	*2*	***0,7***	*2*	***1,3***	*3*
TOTAL	***100%***	**225**	***100%***	**274**	***100%***	**235**

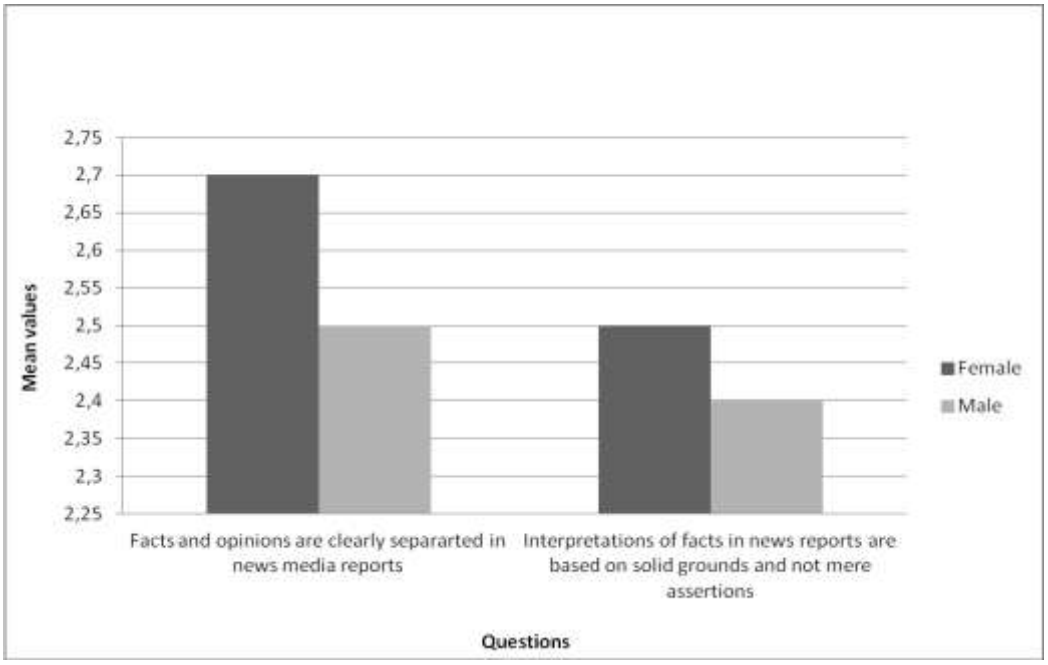
Figure 32. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"Overall, I can trust news media reports"* (by country)



There were no significant differences between females and males within each country sample as to mean *informed media mistrust scale* values. In regard to mean values of the components comprising the *informed media mistrust* scale, only within the Italian sample opinions of females and males were differing as to questions on clear distinction between facts and opinions in news reports (X = 2.7, Md = 3, SD = 0.6 for females and X = 2.5, Md = 2, SD = 0.6 for males) and that interpretations of facts in news reports are based on solid grounds and not mere assertions (X = 2.6, Md = 3, SD = 0.6 for females and X = 2.4, Md = 2, SD = 0.5 for males) (Figure 33). Thus, within the Italian sample, females demonstrated higher

media skepticism answering to the mentioned two questions.

Figure 33. Distinction between opinions of females and males of the Italian sample to two questions of *informed media mistrust* scale



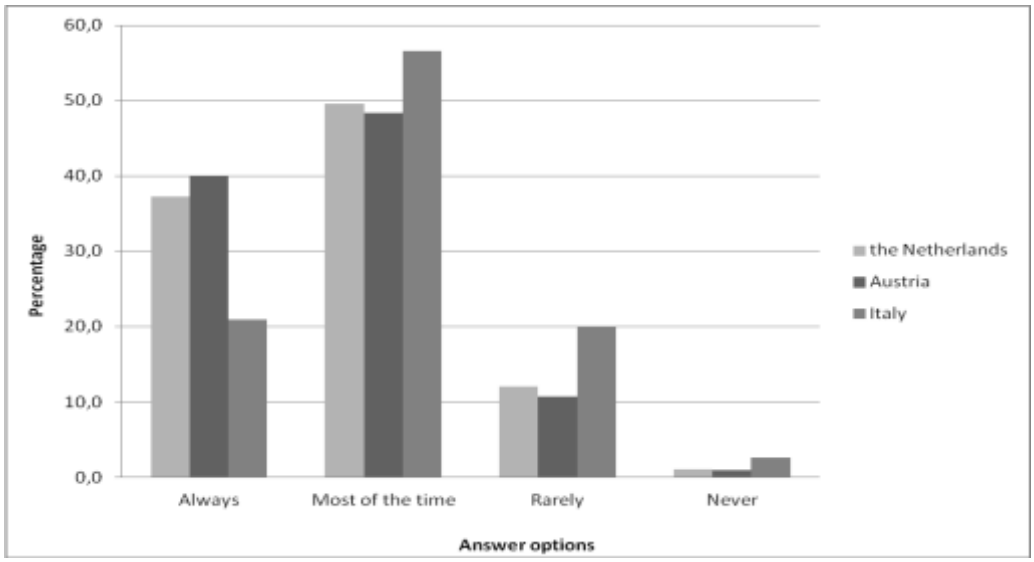
1.1.3. 'Reading between the lines' question

Answers to the question excluded from the *informed media mistrust* scale - *"I try to 'read between the lines' of what I see/read in the news"* - of the overwhelming majority of the participants of all the three countries were to a greater or lesser degree affirmative. However, almost twice as many of the Italian participants compared to the Austrian and the Dutch answered to the question more or less negatively (22,6% vs. 12,7% and 13,1%, respectively) (Table 93 & Figure 34).

Table 93. Distribution of answers to the question *"I try to 'read between the lines' of what I see/read in the news", % & N* (by country)

Answer options	Austria		the Netherlands		Italy	
	%	*N*	*%*	*N*	*%*	*N*
Always	***40,0***	90	***37,2***	*102*	***20,9***	*49*
Most of the time	***48,4***	*109*	***49,6***	*136*	***56,6***	*133*
Rarely	***10,7***	*24*	***12,0***	*33*	***20,0***	*47*
Never	***0,9***	*2*	***1,1***	*3*	***2,6***	*6*
TOTAL	***100%***	**225**	***100%***	**274**	***100%***	**235**

Figure 34. Percent distribution of answers to the question *"I try to 'read between the lines' of what I see/read in the news"* (by country)

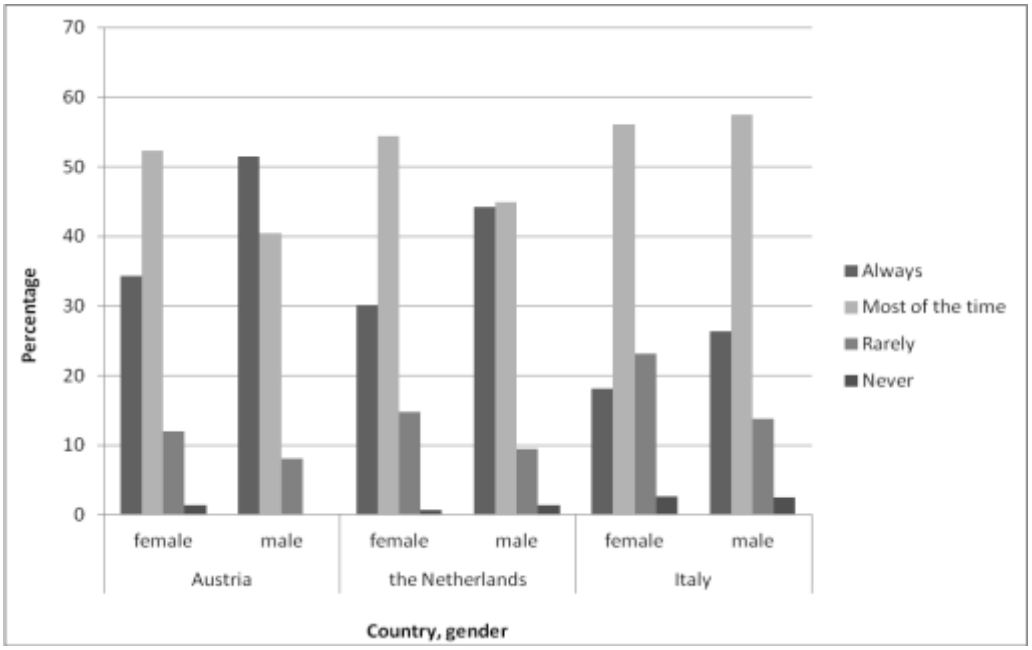


In addition, looking at the answers according to gender, one can see that within all the three samples females more often than males were to one extent or another negative as to reading between the lines (Table 94 & Figure 35).

Table 94. Percent distribution of answers by gender to the question *"I try to 'read between the lines' of what I see/read in the news",* (by country)

Answer options	Austria		the Netherlands		Italy	
	female	***male***	***female***	***male***	***female***	***male***
Always	***34,3***	*51,4*	***30,1***	*44,2*	***18,1***	*26,3*
Most of the time	***52,3***	*40,5*	***54,4***	*44,9*	***56,1***	*57,5*
Rarely	***11,9***	*8,1*	***14,7***	*9,4*	***23,2***	*13,8*
Never	***1,3***	-	***0,7***	*1,4*	***2,6***	*2,5*
TOTAL, *N*	**151**	**74**	**136**	**138**	**155**	**80**

Figure 35. Percent distribution of answers by gender to the question *"I try to 'read between the lines' of what I see/read in the news",* (by country)



1.1.4. Political competence scale

Missing values and outliers

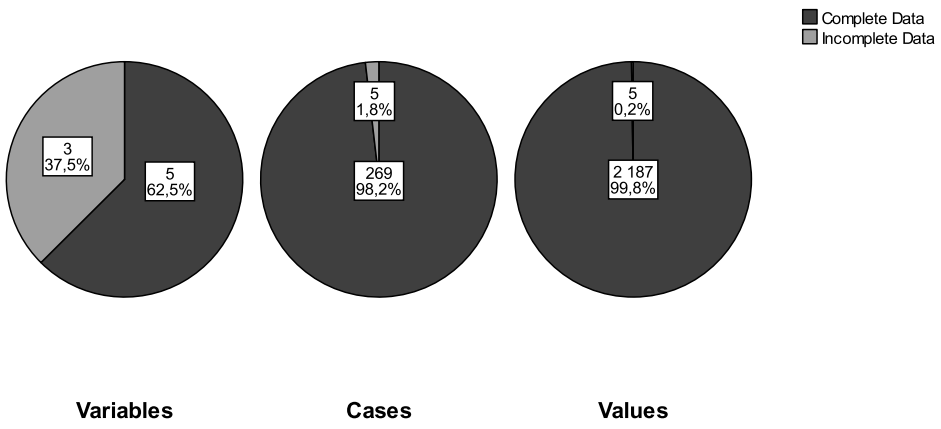
Each sample of the three had some missing values. Given that listwise deletion of missing values was used in calculating the summary statistics, I analyzed the patterns of missing values for each sample to understand if imputation was needed. Based upon the analysis, I decided not to go for an imputation, as the imputed values would not profoundly change the overall picture regarding the distribution of *political competence* scale values across the samples. Details are shown in Table 95 and Figure 36.

Table 95. Overall summary of missing values

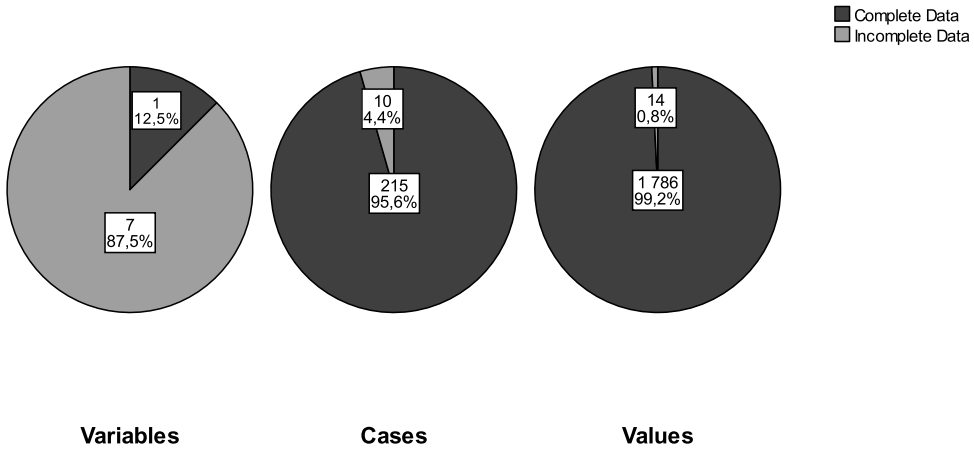
Samples	CASES					
	Valid		***Missing***		***Total***	
	N	***%***	***N***	***%***	***N***	***%***
Austria	***215***	*95,6*	***10***	*4,4*	***225***	*100%*
the Netherlands	***269***	*98,2*	***5***	*1,8*	***274***	*100%*
Italy	***221***	*93,2*	***16***	*6,8*	***237***	*100%*

Figure 36. Overall summary of missing values (by country)

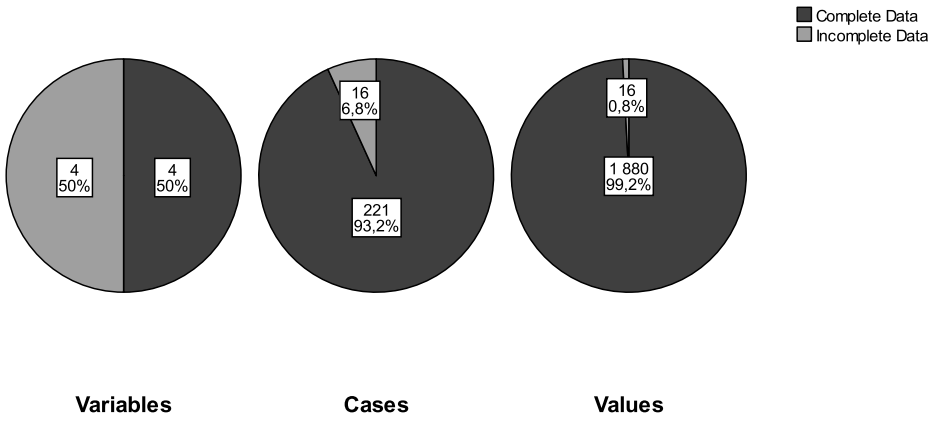
THE NETHERLANDS



AUSTRIA



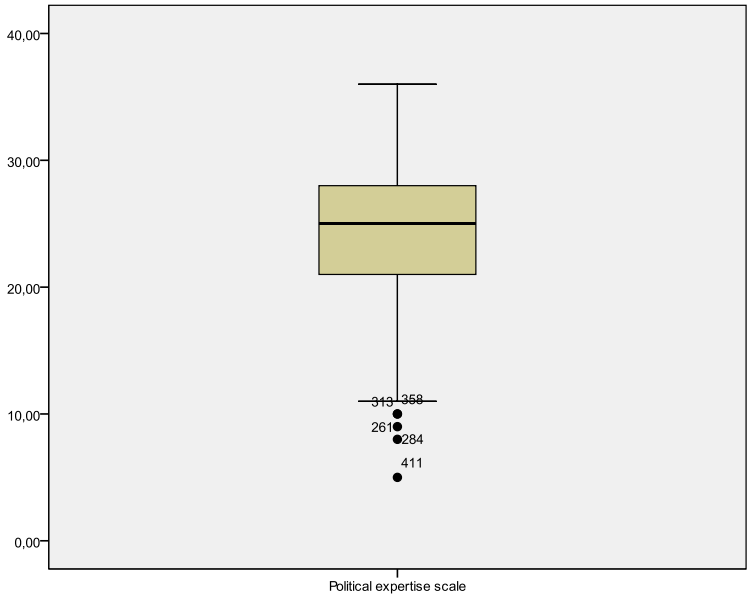
ITALY



Then, having analyzed the statistical data for outliers, I found that the Dutch sample had five of them (Figure 37).

Figure 37. Boxplots for outliers in *political competence scale* (by country)

THE NETHERLANDS



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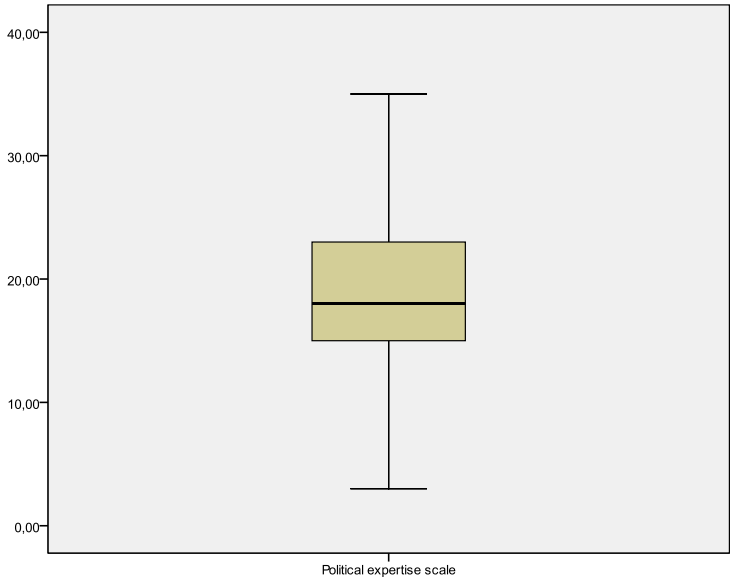
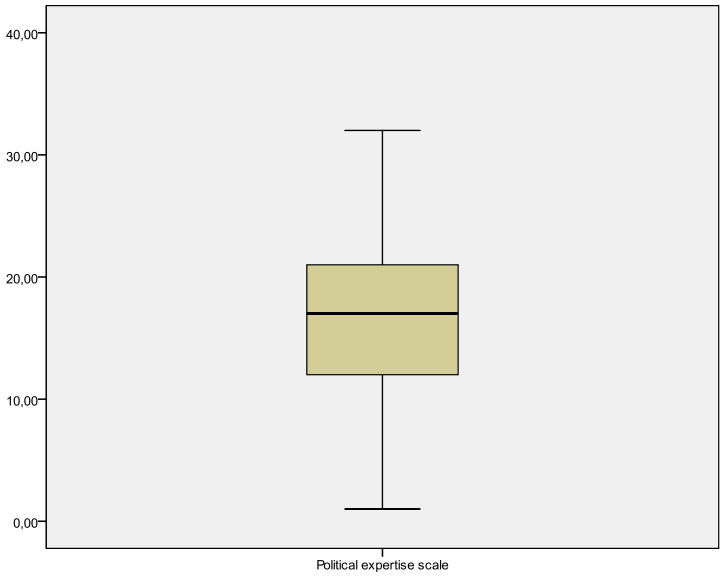


ITALY



However, deletion of the outliers in the Dutch sample did not really change the values of central tendency or dispersion much. Thus, the mean was improved only marginally - from 24.3 to 24.6; the median remained the same 25.0; and the standard deviation decreased slightly - from 5.8 to 5.4. For this reason, the outliers were retained in the Dutch dataset for further statistical analysis.

Correlations between components of the *political competence* scale

The correlation values between components of the *political competence* scale are all positive but differ in their strength from sample to sample (Tables 96 - 98). What is typical of each of three samples is that the strongest correlations exist between 'interest in politics', on one side, and 'days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media' and 'participating in political discussions in a typical week', on the other side; as well as between 'days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media' and 'participating in political discussions in a typical week'. Also, strong correlations were noted in the Dutch and Italian samples between participants' intentions to vote in national and local elections.

Table 96. Pearson correlations between components of the *political competence scale* for the Dutch sample (*N*=269, two-tailed)

	To what extent you are interested in politics	Days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media	Participating in political discussions in a typical week	Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions	Factual political knowledge scale	Political activity scale	Going to vote in national elections	Going to vote in local (regional) elections
To what extent you are interested in politics	1	.720**	.588**	.377**	.433**	.299**	.091	.123*
Days in a typical week intentionally get political information from news media	.720**	1	.621**	.342**	.413**	.287**	.076	.121*
Participating in political discussions in a typical week	.588**	.621**	1	.416**	.339**	.324**	.041	.104
Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions	.377**	.342**	.416**	1	.259**	.220**	.136*	.206**
Factual political knowledge scale	.433**	.413**	.339**	.259**	1	.370**	.080	.217**
Political activity scale	.299**	.287**	.324**	.220**	.370**	1	.158**	.293**
Going to vote in national elections	.091	.076	.041	.136*	.080	.158**	1	.404**
Going to vote in local (regional) elections	.123*	.121**	.104	.206**	.217**	.293**	.404**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Table 97. Pearson correlations between components of the *political competence scale* for the Austrian sample (*N*=215, two-tailed)

	To what extent you are interested in politics	Days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media	Participating in political discussions in a typical week	Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions	Factual political knowledge scale	Political activity scale	Going to vote in national elections	Going to vote in local (regional) elections
To what extent you are interested in politics	1	.728**	.652**	.368**	.282**	.522**	.184**	.170*
Days in a typical week intentionally get political information from news media	.728**	1	.665**	.429**	.250**	.423**	.254**	.186**
Participating in political discussions in a typical week	.652**	.665**	1	.435**	.168*	.469**	.185**	.144*
Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions	.368**	.429**	.435**	1	.049	.363**	.182**	.181**
Factual political knowledge scale	.282**	.250**	.168*	.049	1	.189**	.159*	.194**
Political activity scale	.522**	.423**	.469**	.363**	.189**	1	.231**	.200**
Going to vote in national elections	.184**	.254**	.185**	.182**	.159*	.231**	1	.625**
Going to vote in local (regional) elections	.170*	.186**	.144*	.181**	.194**	.200**	.625**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

Table 98. Pearson correlations between components of the *political competence scale* for the Italian sample (*N*=221, two-tailed)

	To what extent you are interested in politics	Days in typical week intentionally get political information from news media	Participating in political discussions in a typical week	Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions	Factual political knowledge scale	Political activity scale	Going to vote in national elections	Going to vote in local (regional) elections
To what extent you are interested in politics	1	.666**	.605**	.482**	.325**	.361**	.200**	.287**
Days in a typical week intentionally get political information from news media	.666**	1	.573**	.415**	.295**	.291**	.121	.223**
Participating in political discussions in a typical week	.605**	.573**	1	.493**	.317**	.377**	.098	.174**
Challenging standpoints of opponent in political discussions	.482**	.415**	.493**	1	.274**	.213**	.145*	.162*
Factual political knowledge scale	.325**	.295**	.317**	.274**	1	.209**	.005	.075
Political activity scale	.361**	.291**	.377**	.213**	.209**	1	.280**	.281**
Going to vote in national elections	.200**	.121	.098	.145*	.005	.280**	1	.791**
Going to vote in local (regional) elections	.287**	.223**	.174**	.162*	.075	.281**	.791**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

1.1.5. Measuring attitudes toward Moldova - the scene of action in the news reports

As one can see from Table 99 and Table 100, the average values for different types of news reports within one sample are consistent, with the Austrians and the Dutch demonstrated rather neutral attitudes and the Italians showed unfavorable ones.

Table 99. Summary statistics for participant attitudes toward Moldova according to the type of the news reports (by country))

Type of news report	Netherlands	Austria	Italy
Balanced	*M* = 2,5 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,8	*M* = 2,9 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,8	*M* = 2,4 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,9
Manipulated	*M* = 2,6 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,8	*M* = 2,8 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,7	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,0 SD = 0,9
TOTAL, *N*	**169**	**224**	**232**

Table 100. Percent distribution of participant attitudes toward Moldova according to the type of the news reports (by country)

Attitudes scale	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Very unfavorable	*10,3*	*11,3*	*0,9*	*2,6*	*15,7*	*19,8*
2	*36,8*	*27,1*	*29,9*	*27,4*	*40,5*	*42,3*
3	*47,1*	*54,1*	*56,1*	*60,7*	*35,5*	*30,6*
4	*5,9*	*5,3*	*8,4*	*7,7*	*7,4*	*6,3*
Very favorable	-	*2,3*	*4,7*	*1,7*	*0,8*	*0,9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

1.2. Post-stimuli questions

1.2.1. Questions measured importance and understandability of the news reports

In this section are shown percent distributions of responses to the original questions measured importance and understandability of the news reports, that is, the questions with four answer options: 'definitely yes', 'rather yes', rather no', 'definitely no' (Tables 101 - 102 and Figures 38 - 39).

Table 101. Percent distribution of participant answers to the original question *"In your personal opinion, is the subject of the news report important?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)

Answer options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*7,2*	*37,5*	*13,0*	*54,7*	*52,0*	*74,1*
Rather yes	*58,7*	*51,5*	*45,4*	*40,2*	*36,6*	*24,1*
Rather no	*29,0*	*11,0*	*39,8*	*5,1*	*11,4*	*0,9*
Definitely no	*5,1*	-	*1,9*	-	-	*0,9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 38. Percent distribution of participant answers to the original question *"In your personal opinion, is the subject of the news report important?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)

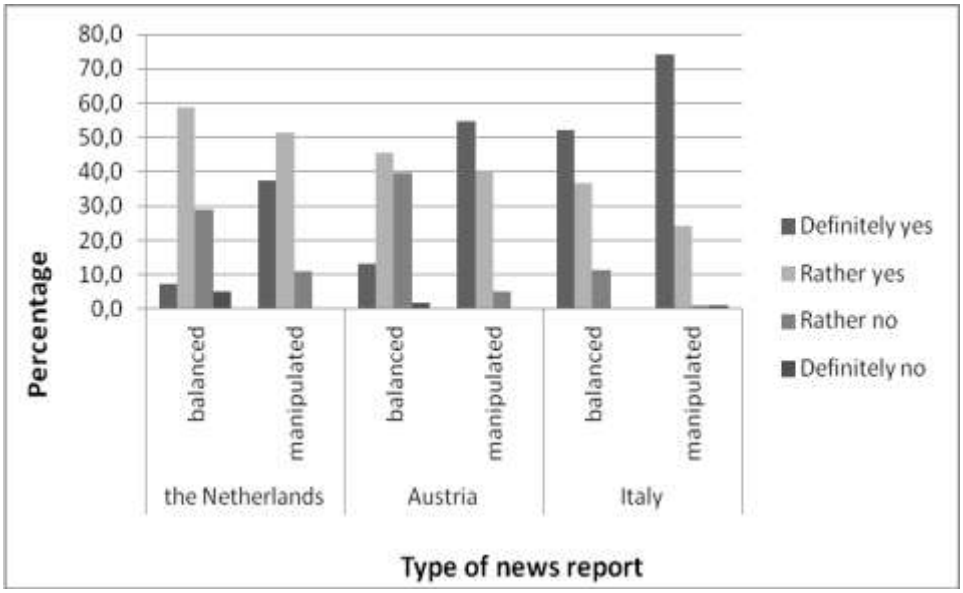
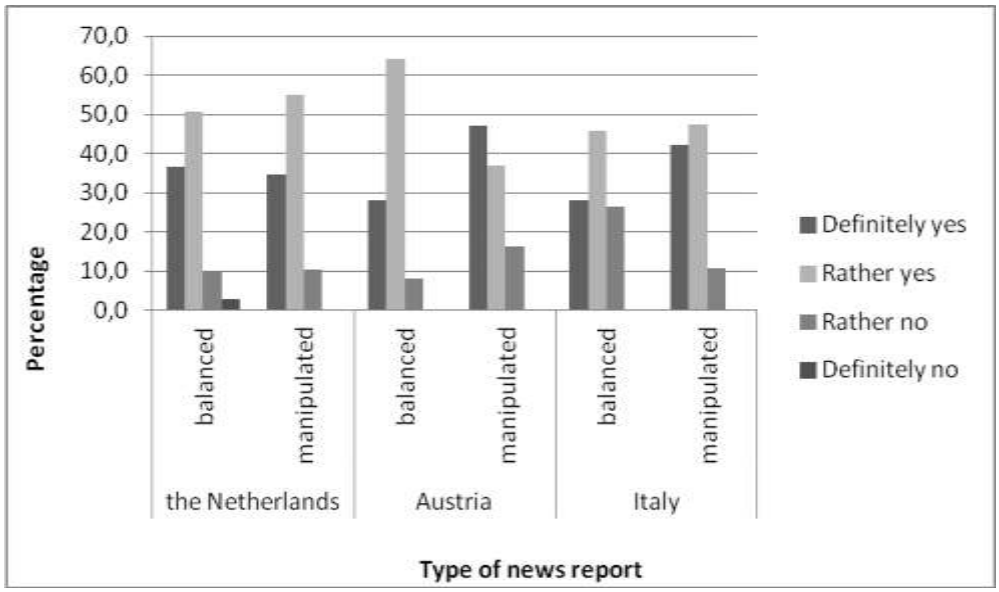


Table 102. Percent distribution of participant answers to the original question *"Do you find the description of the situation in the news report easy to understand?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*36,6*	*34,6*	*28,0*	*47,0*	*28,1*	*42,0*
Rather yes	*50,7*	*55,1*	*64,0*	*36,8*	*45,6*	*47,3*
Rather no	*9,9*	*10,3*	*8,0*	*16,2*	*26,3*	*10,7*
Definitely no	*2,8*	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 39. Percent distribution of participant answers to the original question *"Do you find the description of the situation in the news report easy to understand?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)



1.2.2. Questions measured spotting manipulated information

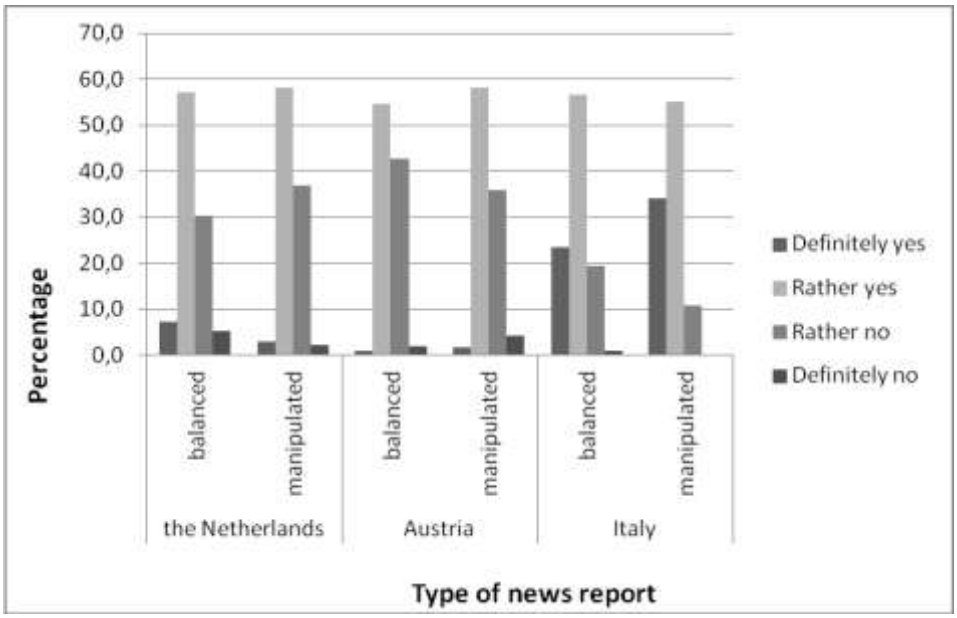
In this section are shown percent distributions of responses to the original questions measured spotting manipulated information, that is, the questions with four answer options: 'definitely yes', 'rather yes', rather no', 'definitely no' Tables 103 - 112 and Figures 40 - 43).

Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'fact-basedness' of news reports

Table 103. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*7,2*	*2,9*	*0,9*	*1,7*	*23,4*	*34,2*
Rather yes	*57,2*	*58,1*	*54,6*	*58,1*	*56,5*	*55,0*
Rather no	*30,4*	*36,8*	*42,6*	*35,9*	*19,4*	*10,8*
Definitely no	*5,1*	*2,2*	*1,9*	*4,3*	*0,8*	-
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 40. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* according to the type of the news reports (by country)



Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'balance' of news reports

Table 104. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Definitely yes	*10,4*	*7,0*	-	*2,0*	*9,0*	*10,5*
Rather yes	*50,7*	*54,9*	*39,7*	*38,0*	*62,7*	*49,1*
Rather no	*38,8*	*36,6*	*51,7*	*54,0*	*28,4*	*36,8*
Definitely no	-	*1,4*	*8,6*	*6,0*	-	*3,5*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

Table 105. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

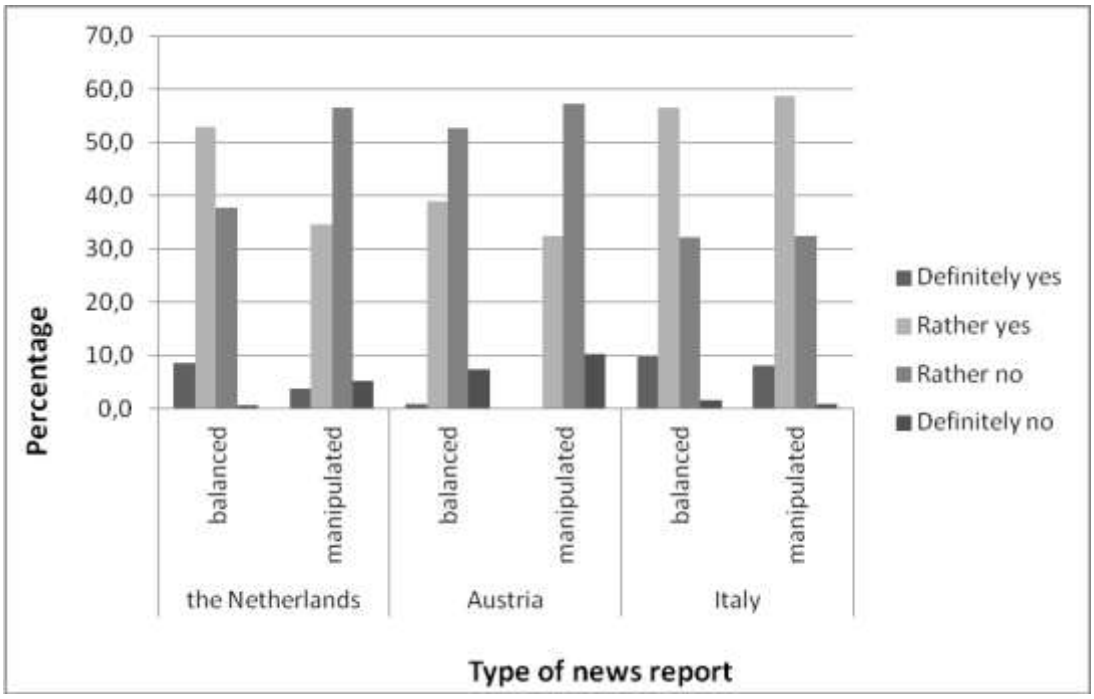
Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Definitely yes	*3,0*	*4,3*	-	-	*7,5*	*8,5*
Rather yes	*32,8*	*36,2*	*40,4*	*25,0*	*65,0*	*54,9*
Rather no	*59,7*	*53,6*	*56,1*	*58,3*	*27,5*	*35,2*
Definitely no	*4,5*	*5,8*	*3,5*	*16,7*	-	*1,4*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Table 106. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the type of the news reports (merged; by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*8,7*	*3,7*	*0,9*	-	*9,7*	*8,1*
Rather yes	*52,9*	*34,6*	*38,9*	*32,5*	*56,5*	*58,6*
Rather no	*37,7*	*56,6*	*52,8*	*57,3*	*32,3*	*32,4*
Definitely no	*0,7*	*5,1*	*7,4*	*10,3*	*1,6*	*0,9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 41. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the type of the news reports (merged; by country)



Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'allegation-loadedness' of news reports

Table 107. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Definitely yes	*1,5*	*2,8*	*5,2*	*2,0*	*6,0*	*7,0*
Rather yes	*37,3*	*23,9*	*19,0*	*18,0*	*50,7*	*31,6*
Rather no	*55,2*	*62,0*	*48,3*	*64,0*	*40,3*	*49,1*
Definitely no	*6,0*	*11,3*	*27,6*	*16,0*	*3,0*	*12,3*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

Table 108. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

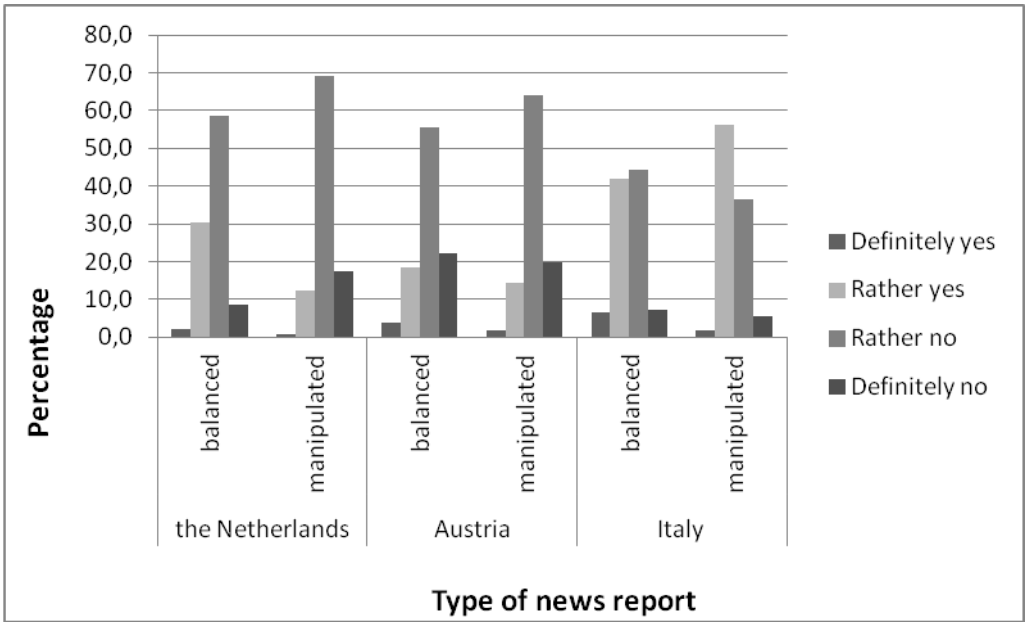
Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Definitely yes	-	*1,4*	*1,8*	*1,7*	*2,5*	*1,4*
Rather yes	*7,5*	*17,4*	*12,3*	*16,7*	*55,0*	*57,1*
Rather no	*79,1*	*59,4*	*68,4*	*60,0*	*42,5*	*32,9*
Definitely no	*13,4*	*21,7*	*17,5*	*21,7*	-	*8,6*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Table 109. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the type of the news report (merged; by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*2,2*	*0,7*	*3,7*	*1,7*	*6,5*	*1,8*
Rather yes	*30,4*	*12,5*	*18,5*	*14,5*	*41,9*	*56,4*
Rather no	*58,7*	*69,1*	*55,6*	*64,1*	*44,4*	*36,4*
Definitely no	*8,7*	*17,6*	*22,2*	*19,7*	*7,3*	*5,5*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 42. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the type of the news report (merged; by country)



Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'overall trust' to news reports

Table 110. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the subtypes of the balanced version of the news report* (by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	BT	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***	***BT***	***BA***
Definitely yes	-	*4,2*	-	-	*7,8*	*5,3*
Rather yes	*65,7*	*49,3*	*39,7*	*40,0*	*60,9*	*50,9*
Rather no	*29,9*	*42,3*	*51,7*	*50,0*	*31,3*	*40,4*
Definitely no	*4,5*	*4,2*	*8,6*	*10,0*	-	*3,5*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*BT - balanced traditional, BA - balanced alternative

Table 111. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the subtypes of the manipulated version of the news report* (by country)

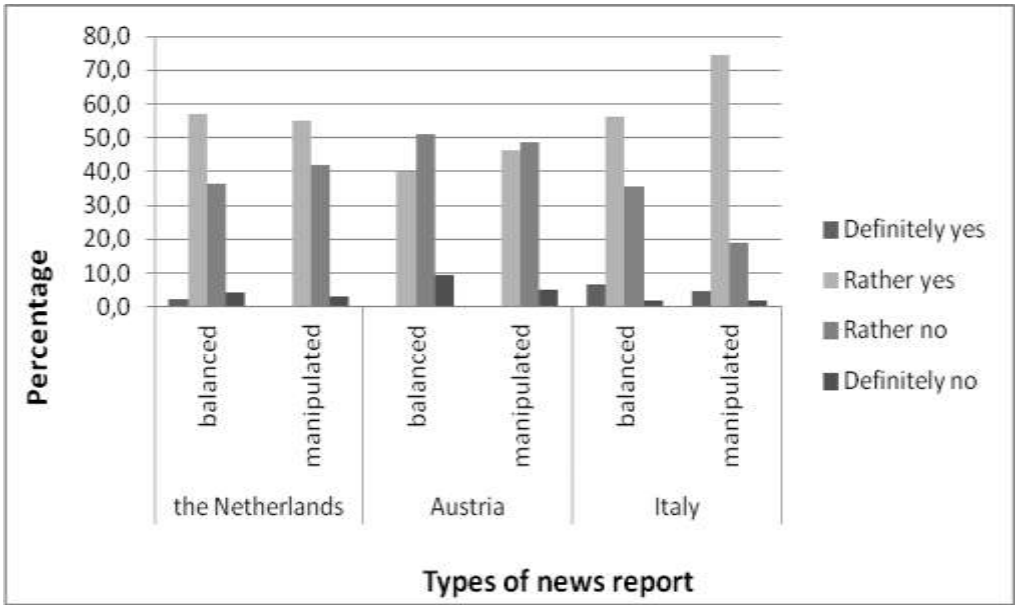
Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	MT	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***	***MT***	***MA***
Definitely yes	-	-	-	-	*5,0*	*4,3*
Rather yes	*49,3*	*60,9*	*49,1*	*43,3*	*75,0*	*74,3*
Rather no	*47,8*	*36,2*	*49,1*	*48,3*	*20,0*	*18,6*
Definitely no	*3,0*	*2,9*	*1,8*	*8,3*	-	*2,9*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

*MT - manipulated traditional, MA - manipulated alternative

Table 112. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the type of the news report (merged; by country)

Response options	Netherlands		Austria		Italy	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*2,2*	-	-	-	*6,6*	*4,5*
Rather yes	*57,2*	*55,1*	*39,8*	*46,2*	*56,2*	*74,5*
Rather no	*36,2*	*41,9*	*50,9*	*48,7*	*35,5*	*19,1*
Definitely no	*4,3*	*2,9*	*9,3*	*5,1*	*1,7*	*1,8*
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Figure 43. Percent distribution of participant responses to the original question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the type of the news report (merged; by country)



1.2.3. Spotting scales

Correlations between components of the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions*

All questions in the scale were correlated. The correlations are statistically significant and positive (Tables 113 - 115).

Table 113. Correlations between questions comprising the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions*: the Netherlands.

	Consider news report fact-based	**Agree news report is balanced**	**Is news report free from allegations**	**Overall can you trust news report**
Consider news report fact-based	-	476**	178*	413**
Agree news report is balanced	476**	-	337**	391**
Is news report free from allegations	178*	336**	-	222**
Overall can you trust news report	413**	391**	222**	-

**Correlation is significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed), * Correlation is significant at p<0.05 (two-tailed)

Table 114. Correlations between questions comprising the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions*: Austria.

	Consider news report fact-based	**Agree news report is balanced**	**Is news report free from allegations**	**Overall can you trust news report**
Consider news report fact-based	-	371**	313**	591**
Agree news report is balanced	371**	-	379**	411**
Is news report free from allegations	313**	379**	-	360**
Overall can you trust news report	591**	411**	360**	-

**Correlation is significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Table 115. Correlations between questions comprising the *ordinal spotting scale of four questions*: Italy.

	Consider news report fact-based	**Agree news report is balanced**	**Is news report free from allegations**	**Overall can you trust news report**
Consider news report fact-based	-	558**	427**	527**
Agree news report is balanced	558**	-	434**	508**
Is news report free from allegations	427**	434**	-	522**
Overall can you trust news report	527**	508**	522**	-

**Correlation is significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Summary statistics and percent distributions of *ordinal spotting scale of three questions*

The summary statistics for both *ordinal spotting scale of four questions* and *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* were quite similar (Table 116).

Table 116. Summary statistics for *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* according to the type of news report (by country)

	the Netherlands		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Ordinal spotting scale of three questions	*M* = 2,5 Md = 2,5 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,3 Md = 2,3 SD = 0,4	*M* = 2,2 Md = 2,1 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,2 Md = 2,3 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,6 Md = 2,7 SD = 0,5	*M* = 2,7 Md = 3,0 SD = 0,5
TOTAL, *N*	**138**	**136**	**108**	**117**	**121**	**110**

Notwithstanding, the percent distribution of participant responses for *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* somewhat differed from that for *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* (Table 117). In particular, percent rise was noted in 'spotting' response options for both versions of the news reports of the *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* (Table 118); however, percentage wise, the results of both scales were similar to each other.

Table 117. Percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* according to the type of the news report (by country)

Responses	**the Netherlands**		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely no	-	*1,5*	*3,7*	*1,7*	-	*0,9*
1,33	-	*0,7*	*5,6*	*6,0*	*1,7*	*0,9*
1,67	*5,8*	*10,3*	*10,2*	*12,0*	*5,0*	*0,9*
Rather no	*22,5*	*28,7*	*30,6*	*26,5*	*14,9*	*12,7*
2,33	*21,7*	*27,9*	*18,5*	*26,5*	*18,2*	*16,4*
2,67	*23,2*	*22,1*	*17,6*	*19,7*	*22,3*	*16,4*
Rather yes	*18,1*	*6,6*	*10,2*	*6,0*	*24,0*	*41,8*
3,33	*7,2*	*1,5*	*2,8*	*1,7*	*8,3*	*9,1*
3,67	*1,4*	*0,7*	*0.9*	-	*5,0*	*0,9*
Definitely yes	-	-	-	-	*0,8*	-
TOTAL, *%*	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 118. Cumulative percent distribution of participant responses on the *ordinal spotting scale of three questions* according to the type of the news report (by country)

	the Netherlands		**Austria**		**Italy**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
'No' (as spotting)	*28,3*	*41,2*	*50,0*	*46,2*	*21,5*	*15,5*
Neither (in between)	*44,9*	*50,0*	*36,1*	*46,2*	*40,5*	*32,8*
'Yes' (as non-spotting)	*26,8*	*8,8*	*13,9*	*7,6*	*38,0*	*48,3*
TOTAL, %	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

APPENDIX D

ADDITIONAL STATISTICS ON THE ITALIAN SAMPLE IN THREE AGE CATEGORIES OF 19-26, 27-35 AND 36 ≤ YEAR OLDS

1. Descriptive statistics for the study questions

1.1. Pre-stimuli questions

1.1.1. Online news sources use in a typical week

There were no significant differences between different age categories in use of online news sources in a typical week for getting news (no differences as to gender, either) (Table 119).

Table 119. *Online news sources use* by age groups

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*5,4*	*5,7*	*5,6*
Md	*6*	*7*	*6*
SD	*1,7*	*1,8*	*2*
N	**236**	**85**	**71**

1.1.2. General Internet news sources trust

No differences were found between different age categories concerning Internet news sources trust in general (no differences as to gender, either) (Table 120).

Table 120. *General Internet news sources trust* by age groups

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*5*	*4,9*	*5*
Md	*5*	*5*	*5*
SD	*1,8*	*1,3*	*1,6*
N	**236**	**85**	**71**

1.1.3. 'Traditional' and 'alternative' Internet news sources trust

No differences were found between age categories of 19-26 and 27-35 years old. However, participants aged 36 ≤ years old regarded the 'alternative' Internet news sources as slightly more trustworthy, and the 'traditional' ones as slightly less trustworthy compared to participants of the other two age categories (no differences as to gender, either) (Table 86).

Table 121. *'Traditional' and 'alternative' Internet news sources trust* by age groups

Stats.	**19 – 26 years old**		**27 – 35 years old**		**36 ≤ years old**	
	Trad.	***Alt.***	***Trad.***	***Alt.***	***Trad.***	***Alt.***
X	*5,3*	*3,8*	*5,3*	*3,9*	*5*	*4,4*
Md	*6*	*4*	*5*	*4*	*5*	*4*
SD	*1,2*	*1,5*	*1,2*	*1,3*	*1,3*	*1,3*
N	**236**		**85**		**72**	

1.1.4. Informed media mistrust

No differences were found between different age categories as to *informed media mistrust scale* (no differences as to gender, either) (Table 122).

Table 122. Statistics on *informed media mistrust scale* by age groups

Stats.	**19 – 26 years old**	**27 – 35 years old**	**36 ≤ years old**
X	*2,5*	*2,5*	*2,4*
Md	*2,5*	*2,5*	*2,5*
SD	*0,4*	*0,4*	*0,3*
N	**233**	**84**	**71**

1.1.5. Political competence: questions and scale

Political interest

Participants in the age categories of 19 to 26 years old and 27 to 35 years old were less interested in politics than those aged 36 years and older (Table 123).

Table 123. *Interest in politics* by age groups

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*2,3*	*2,4*	*2,8*
Md	*2,0*	*2,0*	*3,0*
SD	*0,7*	*0,8*	*0,6*
N	**237**	**85**	**72**

Also, as Table 124 on response frequencies shows, there were no persons in the age category of 36 ≤ who were not at all interested in politics.

Table 124. Response frequencies to *interest in politics* question by age groups

AGE GROUPS	Response options	Frequency	Percentage
19 to 26	**Not at all**	29	12,2%
	A little	116	48,9%
	Somewhat	80	33,8%
	Very much	12	5,1%
	TOTAL	**237**	**100%**
27 to 35	**Not at all**	10	11,8%
	A little	40	47,1%
	Somewhat	27	31,8%
	Very much	8	9,4%
	TOTAL	**85**	**100%**
36 ≤	**Not at all**	--	--
	A little	20	27,8%
	Somewhat	45	62,5%
	Very much	7	9,7%
	TOTAL	**72**	**100%**

No differences for gender were found.

Intentionally getting political information from news media in a typical week

Participants in the age category of 36 years old and older intentionally consumed political information in a typical week more often compared to those in the age groups of 19-26 and 27-35 years old (Table 125).

Table 125. Intentionally *getting political information from news media in a typical week* by age category

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*3.9*	*4,1*	*5,2*
Md	*4,0*	*4,0*	*6,0*
SD	*2,1*	*2,1*	*1,7*
N	**235**	**85**	**72**

Also, in general, males were slightly more active in consuming political information from news media compared to females (Table 126).

Table 126. *Intentionally getting political information from news media in a typical week* by gender (whole sample)

Stats.	MALES	FEMALES
X	*4,5*	*4,0*
Md	*5*	*4*
SD	*2,0*	*2,1*
N	**129**	**263**

Participating in political discussions in a typical week

As with previous questions, the participants in the age category of 36 ≤ years old appeared to be slightly more active in talking politics in a typical week (Table 127).

Table 127. ***Participating in political discussions in a typical week*** **by age category**

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*1,6*	*1,7*	*2,4*
Md	*1*	*2*	*2*
SD	*1,2*	*1,2*	*1,2*
N	**235**	**85**	**72**

No significant differences were found for gender.

Challenging opponent(s) standpoint(s) during political discussions

No significant differences were found between different age categories as to challenging opponent(s) standpoint(s) during the political discussions (Table 128).

Table 128. ***Challenging opponent(s) standpoint(s) during the political discussions*** **by age category**

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*1,4*	*1,4*	*1,6*
Md	*1,0*	*2,0*	*2,0*
SD	*0,9*	*0,8*	*0,7*
N	**235**	**85**	**72**

No significant differences were found for gender.

Political activities

Percent distribution in Table 129 shows that the participants in the age category of 36 ≤ years old participated overall in more political activities compared to the other two age groups.

Table 129. Percentage of persons by age groups participated in political activities

Political activity: In past 2 years, have you…	19 - 26 y.o. (*N* = 237)	27 - 35 y.o. (*N* = 85)	36 ≤ y.o. (*N* = 72)
ever written a letter to a newspaper on a political issue	*3,4%*	*7,1%*	*4,2%*
joined a political organization	*5,5%*	*7,1%*	*12,5%*
already been a member of a political organization	*6,3%*	*9,4%*	*22,2%*
ever written a letter to a politician or official	*4%*	*4,7%*	*12,5%*
ever signed a petition on a political issue	*35%*	*42,4%*	*58,3%*
ever participated in a march, demonstration, or protest	*49%*	*30,6%*	*28%*
voted in the recent national elections	*82%*	*87,1%*	*81,7%*
attended any political meetings or rallies	*42%*	*36,5%*	*39%*
voted in the recent local elections	*84%*	*90,6%*	*91,7%*
ever campaigned for a candidate/political party	*12%*	*14,1%*	*16,7%*

In some political activities males were more active compared to females (Table 130).

Table 130. Percentage of persons by gender participated in political activities

Political activity: In past 2 years, have you…	Males (N = 130)	Females (*N* = 264)
ever written a letter to a newspaper on a political issue	*7,7%*	*2,7%*
joined a political organization	*11,5%*	*4,9%*
already been a member of a political organization	*15,4%*	*7,2%*
ever written a letter to a politician or official	*7,7%*	*4,5%*
ever signed a petition on a political issue	*43,1%*	*39,8%*
ever participated in a march, demonstration, or protest	*40,3%*	*41,7%*
voted in the recent national elections	*85,4%*	*81,7%*
attended any political meetings or rallies	*40,0%*	*40,2%*
voted in the recent local elections	*83,1%*	*89,0%*
ever campaigned for a candidate/political party	*19,2%*	*10,6%*

Factual political knowledge

As is seen from Table 131 below, neither age category takes a lead in answering factual political questions, for either both those relating to European Union issues and those relating to internal Italian politics.

Table 131. Percentage of correct responses given to *factual political questions* by age category

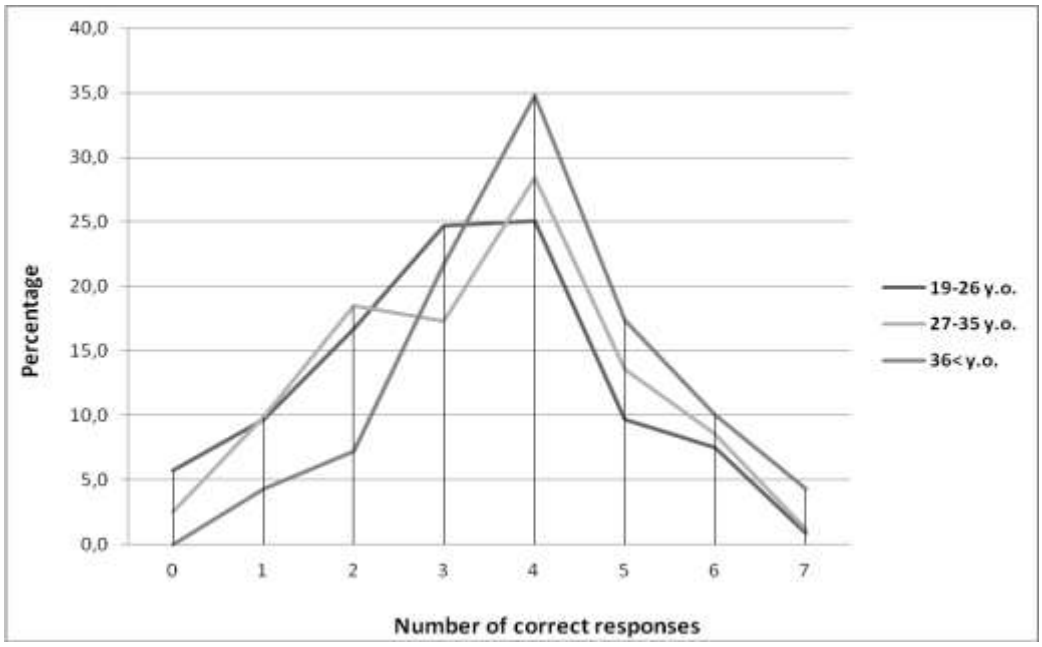
Factual political questions	19 - 26 y.o. (*N* = 227)	27 - 35 y.o. (*N* = 81)	36 ≤ y.o. (*N* = 69)
Switzerland is a Member of the EU	*32,1%*	*25,0%*	*15,5%*
The EU has 25 Member States	*57,1%*	*60,2%*	*74,3%*
Every country in the EU elects the same number of Representatives to the European Parliament	*47,4%*	*50,0%*	*40,3%*
Every six months a different Member State becomes President of Council of the EU	*20,3%*	*28,2%*	*52,1%*
The Italian Minister of Education and Science is Francesco Profumo	*40,3%*	*47,1%*	*72,2%*
It is necessary to be at least 25 years old to stand as a candidate in national elections	*53,4%*	*55,3%*	*54,9%*
In the Italian Chamber of Deputies there are 945 Members	*47,4%*	*50,0%*	*40,3%*

However, looking at the factual *political knowledge* scale, it becomes evident that more participants in the age category of 36 ≤ years old answered more factual questions compared to the other two age categories (Table 132 & Figure 44).

Table 132. Percentage of total correct responses given on *factual political questions* scale by age category

Number of correct answers	19 - 26 y.o. (*N* = 227)	27 - 35 y.o. (*N* = 81)	36 ≤ y.o. (*N* = 69)
0	*5,7%*	*2,5%*	-
1	*9,7%*	*9,9%*	*4,3%*
2	*16,7%*	*18,5%*	*7,2%*
3	*24,7%*	*17,3%*	*21,7%*
4	*25,1%*	*28,4%*	*34,8%*
5	*9,7%*	*13,6%*	*17,4%*
6	*7,5%*	*8,6%*	*10,1%*
7	*0,9*	*1,2%*	*4,3%*

Figure 44. Percentage of total correct responses given on *factual political questions* scale by age category

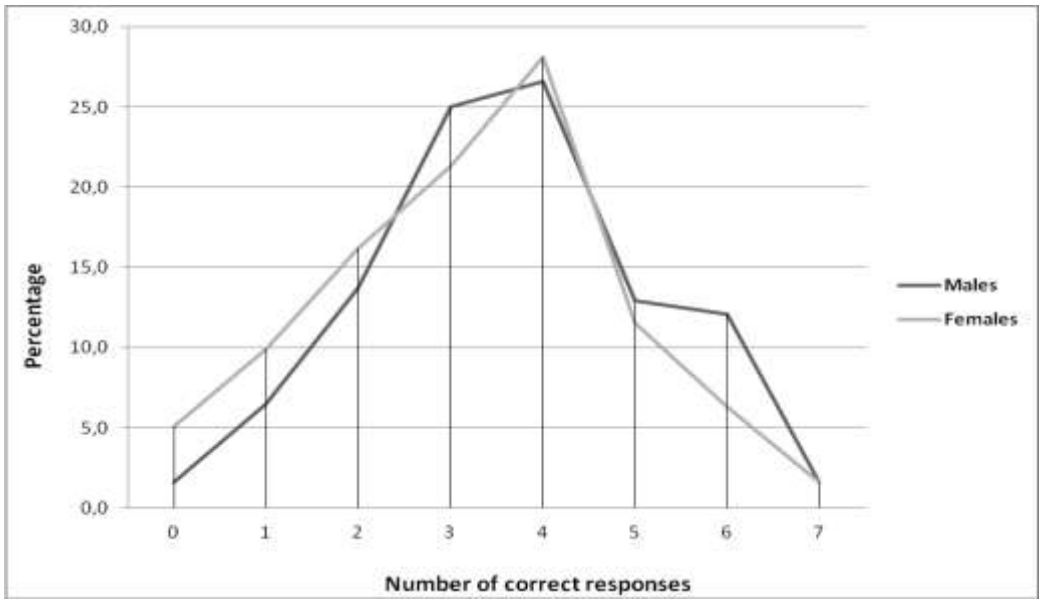


In addition, males appeared to be slightly more politically knowledgeable than females (Table 133 & Figure 45).

Table 133. Percentage of total correct answers given on *factual political questions* scale by gender (whole sample)

Number of correct answers	MALES	FEMALES
0	1,6%	5,1%
1	6,5%	9,9%
2	13,7%	16,2%
3	25,0%	21,3%
4	26,6%	28,1%
5	12,9%	11,5%
6	12,1%	6,3%
7	1,6%	1,6%
TOTAL	**130**	**264**

Figure 45. Percentage of total correct answers given on *factual political questions* scale by gender (whole sample)



Political competence scale

Figures 46 - 49 show histograms and box plots for each age category.

Figure 46. Histogram on *political competence scale* for age category of 19-26 years old

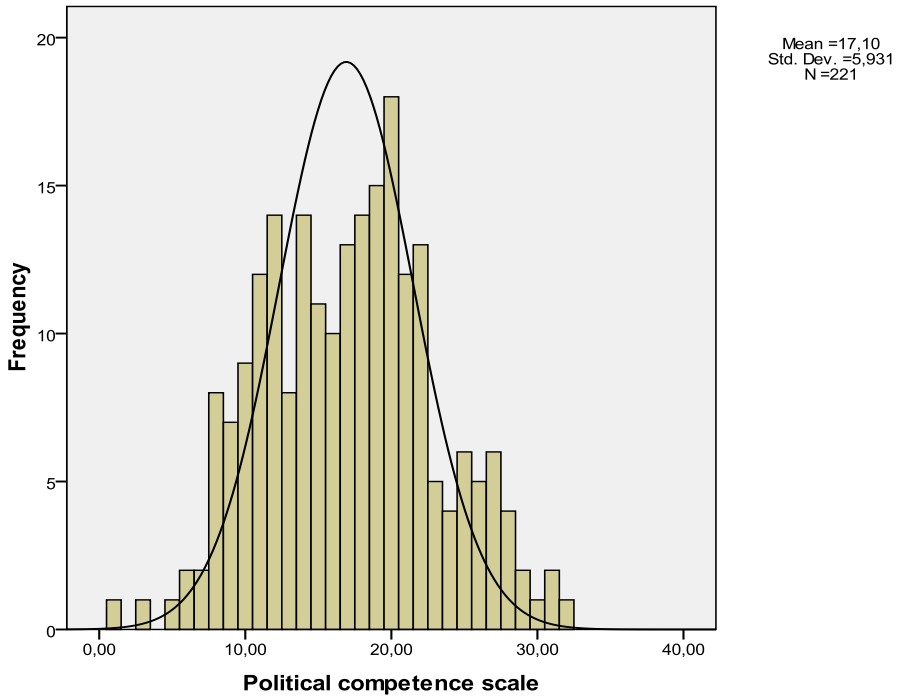


Figure 47. Histogram on *political competence scale* for age category of 27-35 years old

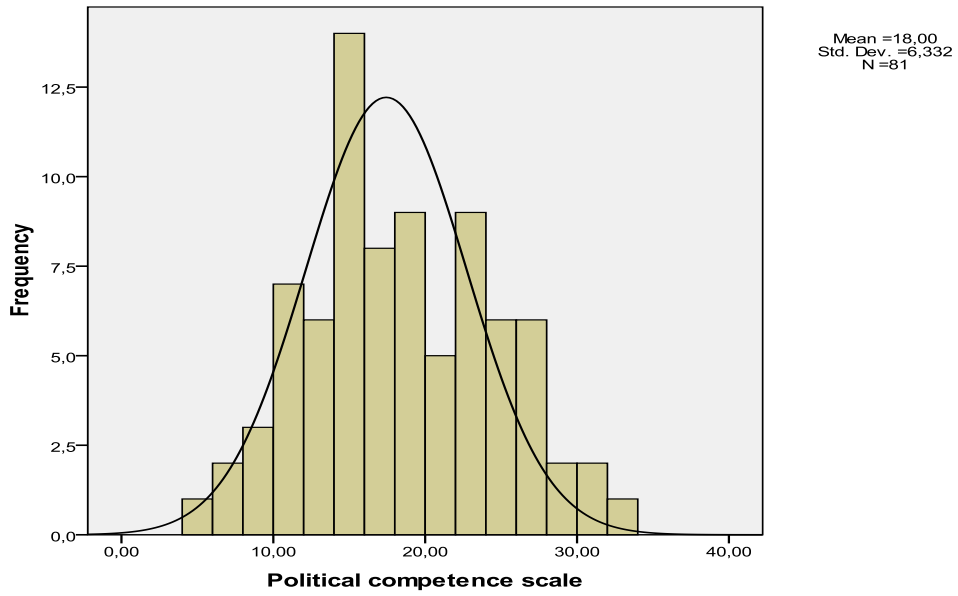


Figure 48. Histogram on *political competence scale* for age category of 36 ≤ years old

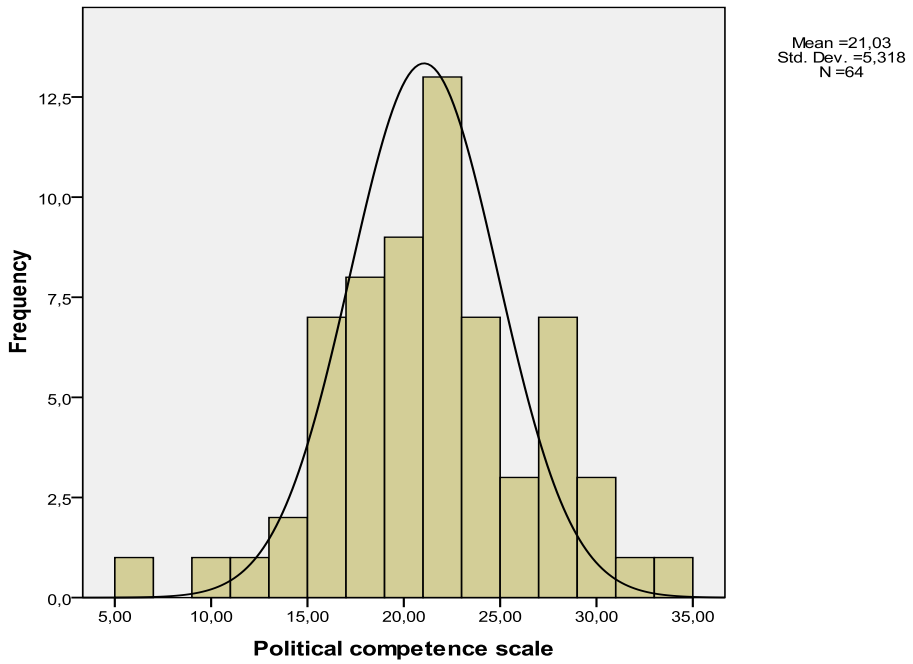
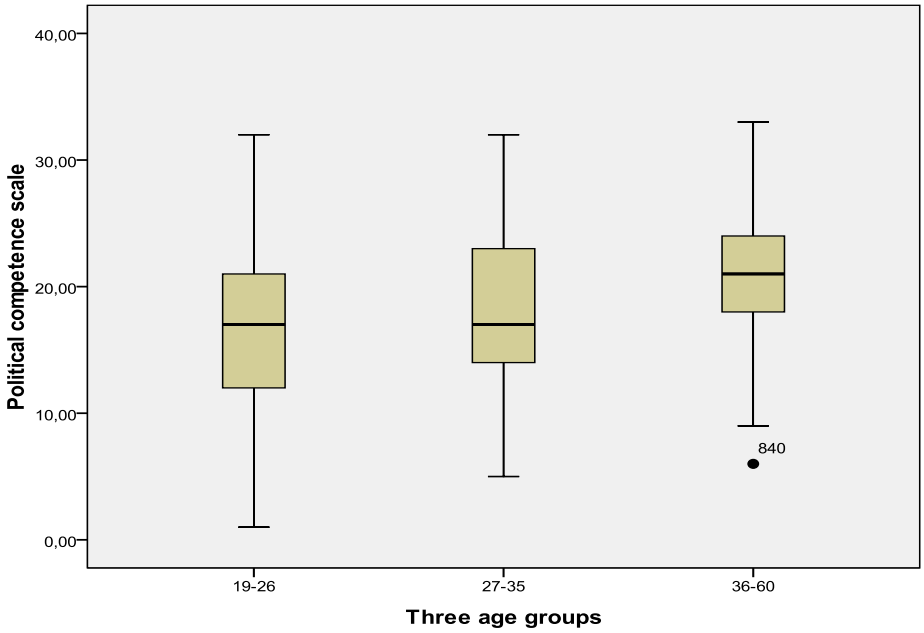


Figure 49. Box plots on *political competence scale* by age categories



In addition, males scored higher than females on *political competence scale* (Table 134).

Table 134. Summary statistics of *political competence scale* by gender (whole sample)

Stats.	Males	Females
X	*19,3*	*17,3*
Md	*20,0*	*17,5*
SD	*6,1*	*5,9*
Min.	*5*	*1*
Max.	*31*	*33*
Range	*26*	*32*
N	**120**	**246**

1.1.6 Measuring attitudes toward Moldova - the scene of action in the news reports

The majority of the Italian participants in all three age categories showed unfavorable or rather unfavorable attitudes toward Moldova (Table 134 -135).

Table 135. Summary statistics for overall attitudes toward Moldova by age categories

Stats.	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
X	*2,3*	*2,3*	*2,1*
Md	*2,0*	*2,0*	*2,0*
SD	*0,9*	*0,9*	*0,8*
N	**232**	**81**	**72**

Table 136. Percent distribution of participant attitudes toward Moldova according to the age category

Attitudes scale	19 – 26 years old	27 – 35 years old	36 ≤ years old
Very unfavorable	*17,7%*	*22,2%*	*25,0%*
2	*41,4%*	*39,5%*	*38,9%*
3	*33,2%*	*29,6%*	*31,9%*
4	*6,9%*	*7,4%*	*4,2%*
Very favorable	*0,9*	*1,2%*	-
N	**232**	**81**	**72**

1.2. Post-stimuli questions

1.2.1. Questions measuring importance and understandability of the news reports

In this section are shown percent distributions of responses to the original questions measured importance and understandability of the news reports, that is, the questions with four answer options: 'definitely yes', 'rather yes', rather no', 'definitely no' (Tables 137 - 138).

Table 137. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"In your personal opinion, is the subject of the news report important?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*52,0*	*74,1*	*35,7*	*55,8*	*50,0*	*62,2*
Rather yes	*36,6*	*24,1*	*45,2*	*41,9*	*32,4*	*32,4*
Rather no	*11,4*	*0,9*	*16,7*	*2,3*	*14,7*	*5,4*
Definitely no	-	*0,9*	*2,4*	-	*2,9*	-
TOTAL, N	**121**	**110**	**42**	**43**	**35**	**37**

Table 138. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you find the description of the situation in the news report easy to understand?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*32,3*	*42,0*	*33,3*	*30,2*	*20,0*	*27,0*
Rather yes	*40,3*	*47,3*	*50,0*	*51,2*	*40,0*	*56,8*
Rather no	*27,4*	*10,7*	*16,7*	*18,6*	*40,0*	*16,2*
Definitely no	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL, N	**121**	**110**	**42**	**43**	**35**	**37**

1.2.2. Questions measured spotting manipulated information

In this section are shown percent distributions of responses to the original questions measured spotting manipulated information, that is, the questions with four answer options: 'definitely yes', 'rather yes', rather no', 'definitely no' Tables 139 - 142).

Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'fact-basedness' of news reports

Table 139. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you consider the news report as fact-based?"* according to the type of the news report (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*23,4*	*34,2*	*12,2*	*11,6*	*11,4*	*27,0*
Rather yes	*56,5*	*55,0*	*63,4*	*74,4*	*60,0*	*59,5*
Rather no	*19,4*	*10,8*	*22,0*	*14,0*	*28,6*	*13,5*
Definitely no	*0,8*	-	*2,4*	-	-	-
TOTAL, N	**124**	**111**	**41**	**43**	**35**	**37**

Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'balance' of news reports

Table 140. **Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Do you agree that the news report is balanced?"* according to the type of the news report (by age category)**

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*9,7*	*8,1*	*9,5*	*4,8*	*8,6*	*2,7*
Rather yes	*56,5*	*58,6*	*45,2*	*66,7*	*51,4*	*67,6*
Rather no	*32,3*	*32,4*	*38,1*	*26,2*	*34,3*	*27,0*
Definitely no	*1,6*	*0,9*	*7,1*	*2,4*	*5,7*	*2,7*
TOTAL, N	**124**	**111**	**42**	**42**	**35**	**37**

Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'allegation-loadedness' of news reports

Table 141. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Would you say the news report is free from allegations?"* according to the type of the news report (by age category)

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*6,5*	*1,8*	*4,8*	*9,3*	*5,7*	*2,8*
Rather yes	*41,9*	*56,4*	*40,5*	*48,8*	*51,4*	*72,2*
Rather no	*44,4*	*36,4*	*42,9*	*37,2*	*37,1*	*22,2*
Definitely no	*7,3*	*5,5*	*11,9*	*4,7*	*5,7*	*2,8*
TOTAL, N	**124**	**110**	**42**	**43**	**35**	**36**

Percent distribution of responses to the question measured 'overall trust' to news reports

Table 142. Percent distribution of participant responses to the question *"Overall, can the news report be trusted?"* according to the type of the news reports (by age category)

Response options	19-26 years old		27-35 years old		36 ≤ years old	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Definitely yes	*6,6*	*4,5*	*2,4*	*4,7*	*2,9*	*5,4*
Rather yes	*56,2*	*74,5*	*47,6*	*65,1*	*65,7*	*73,0*
Rather no	*35,5*	*19,1*	*45,2*	*30,2*	*25,7*	*18,9*
Definitely no	*1,7*	*1,8*	*4,8*	-	*5,7*	*2,7*
TOTAL, N	**121**	**110**	**42**	**43**	**35**	**37**

1.2.3. Spotting scales

Ordinal spotting scale

All questions in the scale were positively correlated at $p < 0.01$ for all age categories (Tables 143-145).

Table 143. Correlations between questions comprising the *ordinal spotting scale* for the age category of 19-26 years old.

	Consider news report fact-based	**Agree news report is balanced**	**Is news report free from allegations**	**Overall can you trust news report**
Consider news report fact-based	-	362**	330**	511**
Agree news report is balanced	362**	-	454**	507**
Is news report free from allegations	330**	454**	-	490**
Overall can you trust news report	511**	507**	490**	-

**Correlation is significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Table 144. Correlations between questions comprising the *ordinal spotting scale* for the age category of 27-35 years old.

	Consider news report fact-based	**Agree news report is balanced**	**Is news report free from allegations**	**Overall can you trust news report**
Consider news report fact-based	-	588**	534**	556**
Agree news report is balanced	588**	-	721**	644**
Is news report free from allegations	534**	721**	-	644**
Overall can you trust news report	556**	644**	627**	-

**Correlation is significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Table 145. Correlations between questions comprising the *ordinal spotting scale* for the age category of 36 ≤ years old.

	Consider news report fact-based	**Agree news report is balanced**	**Is news report free from allegations**	**Overall can you trust news report**
Consider news report fact-based	-	463**	340**	537**
Agree news report is balanced	463**	-	446**	561**
Is news report free from allegations	340**	446**	-	505**
Overall can you trust news report	537**	561**	505**	-

**Correlation is significant at p<0.01 (two-tailed)

Binomial spotting scale

Table 146 demonstrates the percentage of the participants who either chose 'yes' answers to all the questions (referred to in the table as 'non-spotting') or responded 'no' to only 1 to 3 questions (referred to as corresponding numbers of '1', '2' and '3') compared to those who spotted manipulation (answered 'no' to all four questions).

Table 146. Detailed elaboration of percentage of 'non-spotting' compared to 'spotting' in participant responses on the *binomial spotting scale* (by age category)

Detailed response options	**19-26 years old**		**27-35 years old**		**36 ≤ years old**	
	balanced	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***	***balanced***	***manipulated***
Non-spotting	*34,7*	*49,1*	*39,0*	*52,4*	*42,9*	*61,1*
1	*22,3*	*20,9*	*7,3*	*14,3*	*14,3*	*13,9*
2	*17,4*	*13,6*	*9,8*	*9,5*	*11,4*	*5,6*
3	*15,7*	*8,2*	*24,4*	*16,7*	*20,0*	*11,1*
Spotting	*9,9*	*8,2*	*19,5*	*7,1*	*11,4*	*8,3*
TOTAL, % (*N*)	**100% (*121*)**	**100% (*110*)**	**100% (*41*)**	**100% (*42*)**	**100% (*35*)**	**100% (*36*)**

1.3. Correlations

Interestingly, for each age category, there were moderate negative correlations between the *informed media mistrust scale* and *trustworthiness of traditional Internet news sources*. To put it another way, the more a participant mistrusted media in general, the less he or she regarded traditional Internet news sources as trustworthy. No similar correlations were applied to alternative Internet news sources. In particular, for the age category of 19-26 years old: $r(232) = -0.33$, $p < 0.01$; for the age category of 27-35 years old: $r(84) = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$; for the age category of 36 ≤ years old: $r(71) = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$.

Also, moderate positive correlations were found in each age group between online news sources for getting news in a typical week and considering the Internet as a trustworthy source of news. In particular, for the age category of 19-26 years old: $r(235) = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$ for the age category of 27-35 years old: $r(85) = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$; for the age category of 36 ≤ years old: $r(70) = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$.

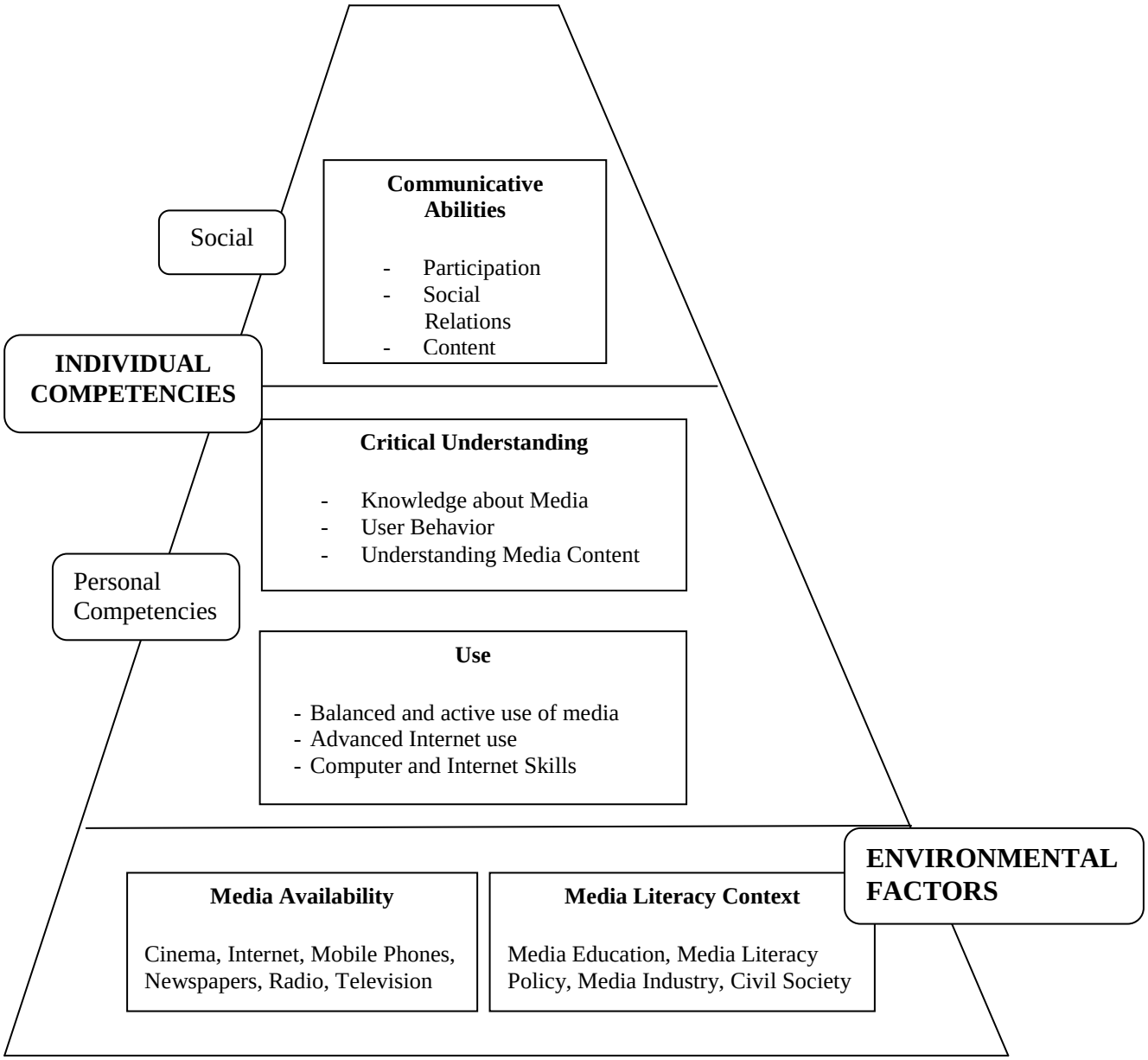
In turn, trustworthiness of the Internet as a source of news was positively correlated in all age categories (from weak to moderate correlations) with trustworthiness of traditional and alternative Internet news sources. In particular, for the age category of 19-26 years old: $r(235) = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$ and $r(235) = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$, respectively; for the age category of 27-35 years old: $r(85) = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$ and $r(85) = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$, respectively; for the age category of 36 ≤ years old: $r(71) = 0.32$, $p < 0.01$ and $r(71) = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$.

APPENDIX E

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS OF MEDIA LITERACY ACCORDING TO THE STUDY ON ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR MEDIA LITERACY LEVELS IN THE MEMBER STATES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (2009)

The media literacy dimensions and their components (criteria) might be depicted in the form of pyramid to demonstrate their sequence order, relations to each other and interrelations (Figure 100). In the base of the pyramid are Media Availability and Media Literacy Context, that both are necessary prerequisites for effective developing Individual Competencies. They share one level because, notwithstanding they are autonomous components, they are still interrelated as, on one side, media literacy policy is supposed to be implemented in the context of media availability, and, on the other side, the context affects to a certain degree media availability. The next levels is covered by personal competencies that are a part of Individual Competencies, and starts with Use which preconditions further development of media literacy expertise. Then follows Critical Understanding component which consists of "knowledge, behavior and understanding of media context and content, and how it manifests itself in behavior", and "includes all the cognitive processes that influence the user's practices" allowing the user "to evaluate aspects of the media, by way of comparing different types and sources of information, arriving to conclusions about its veracity and appropriateness, and making informed choices" (The Study, 2009, p. 33). At the top of the pyramid are Communicative Abilities that are termed in the Study as the highest level of media literacy. In this respect, the Study (2009) considered media literacy as the result of dynamic processes between the base (Availability and Context) and the peak (Communicative Abilities) through individual media competencies (Media Use and Critical Understanding) emphasizing that "it is to state the obvious that the higher steps cannot exist without the lower ones" (p. 31).

Figure 100. "Pyramid" of media literacy



Adapted from the Study (2009).

The following table (Table 147) demonstrates components of this dimension of media literacy and their measurement indicators used in the Study.

Table 147. Environmental Factors, their components, and indicators

CRITERIA	COMPONENTS	INDICATORS
Media Literacy Context	Media Education	• ML presence in the curriculum • ML teachers training • ML educational activities • ML didactic resources
	Media Literacy Policy	• Existence of Regulatory Authorities • Importance of the Authorities Legal Mission • Activities of Regulators on Media Literacy
	Media Industry	• Newspapers • Television channels • Cinema festivals • Telephone companies • Internet providers • Other organizations
	Civil Society	• Organizations which are active in ML • Activities of ML developed by civil associations • Coordination / cooperation between civil associations
Media Availability	Mobile Phones	• Mobile phones per 100 inhabitants
	Internet	• Broadband penetration rate
	Television	• Population and household equipment
	Radio	• Radio sets per 1000 inhabitants
	Newspapers	• Newspaper circulation
	Cinema	• Screens per country

*Adapted from the Final Report of the Study (2009)

Media Availability is understood to mean how various types of media are distributed within a certain environment, as well as how easily they are accessed by individuals. Naturally, diversity of media choices exerts a considerable influence on the development of media literacy. The Study (2009) refers to such diversity as media pluralism and distinguishes between its five types that are crucial for evaluation of the overall situation with the media in any country of the EU and were taken into account in

the Study:

(1) Geographical
    - how fairly and proportionately local and regional communities and their interests are represented.

(2) Cultural
    - how fairly and proportionately cultural and social groups are represented.

(3) Political
    - how fairly and proportionately various political views and groups are represented.

(4) Media types and genres.

(5) Ownership and control.

In relation to *Media Education,* the Study (2009) stated that only if a country has a very effective national media education curriculum in place, which is well established, citizens should be more confident while interacting and engaging with all general forms of media. As the Study (2009) put it: "Any media education initiative is based on the assumption that educational efforts have a positive effects on the skills and capabilities of the individual recipient. It is therefore not unreasonable to establish a positive, though not unanimous, relationship between media education and the progress made in individuals' technical Use, Critical Understanding and Communicative Abilities" (p. 52).

The factor of *Media Literacy Policy* evaluated national legislation and policies as to media literacy development, including "obligations, regulations, and actions, organizations, manifestos of organizations and civic participation with a view to influencing the regulation of media literacy" (p. 49). *Media Industry* component took into account various non-governmental and non-educational activities and initiatives relating to promotion of media literacy. It considered programs, campaigns, user-participation organizations, strategies, supply of resources and the development of didactic material. Finally, the impact of *Civil Society* on promoting media literacy is that civil society organizations and initiatives through active citizen participation stimulate the environmental support that affects increasing levels of media literacy.

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